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TROOPER ROSS
AND
SIGNAL BUTTE

BY CAPT. CHARLES KING, U.S.A.

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Many happy returns of the day from Mama.

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"Oh, murther, murther, Roddie boy, what villain let you across the river?"

[Page 41.]

TROOPER ROSS

AND

SIGNAL BUTTE

BY

CAPTAIN CHARLES KING

U. S. A.

ILLUSTRATED BY

CHARLES H. STEPHENS

PHILADELPHIA

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TROOPER ROSS.

CHAPTER I.

THERE was a scene of wild excitement one summer's night at old Fort Frayne. With the exception of one company of infantry, the entire garrison was in the field. The families of some of the officers had been sent East for the time being, because every one realized that a long and arduous, probably dangerous, campaign was in the wind, and no post in all the wide North-west was in so exposed a position. It lay in the very heart of what had been the Sioux country. The Indians loved the mountains that loomed up to the southward of the old stockade, and resented it that they were forced by treaty stipulations to keep on the north side of the river that swept in grand semicircle around the bold bluff whereon stood the fort. Ever since the grass began to

peep had they been swarming to join the hostile camps hidden far up among the fastnesses of the Big Horn Mountains and in the deep valleys of the Rosebud and the Deje Agie; and even while by thousands the young warriors gathered about the war chiefs of their tribes and covered the whole country beyond Crazy Woman's Fork and rode like red scarecrows all over the miles and miles of broad trails that led from the reservations in North-western Nebraska, smaller bands, swift, agile, daring, kept twinkling into view of the sentries at Frayne, Fetterman, and Laramie, sometimes fording or swimming the stream and raiding far down to the settlements and ranches on the Chug, killing and scalping the men, bearing away women and children, running off herds of cattle, and later, daring even to creep close to the stockades themselves at night and shout challenge and defiance in stentorian tones to the soldiery of the depleted garrisons.

But there were many of the officers' families that were far too poor to afford the costly journey to the East, and there were others that would not have gone even could they have afforded it, and of these latter were the wife and child of Captain Ross. A "first-class soldier" was the captain, a soldier educated at West Point, and the son of a soldier who had died at the head of his company charging the Mexican line within sight of the

walls of the capital. He loved his profession, gloried in the efficiency and reputation of the troop he commanded, was proud of his regiment, and had no hope or ambition that was not centred in them and in the little family dependent upon him. Mrs. Ross was, at times, a brave and cheery little woman, almost as brave as lived in all our little army, and as proud of her soldier husband as he was of his troop, but during his enforced absence in the field and in the midst of all the dangers which surrounded him her heart sometimes failed her. As she expressed it herself, she was apt to "lose her nerve" and to become to the full as timid and hysterical as some of the younger matrons of the garrison. But the hearts of both herself and her husband were bound up in their one remaining child, their only son, a sturdy, healthful, hearty little scamp, barely nine years old at the outbreak of this eventful summer, the boy who became the central figure of the wild excitement at Frayne this summer's night, and from that time forth the hero of many a story told at many an army fireside, and of these stories none were so long as this which you are now invited to read, for it includes many of the others.

They had taken to calling him "Buster" when he was a four-year-old, and the name clung to him, and he rather liked it. His own name, that which was given him in honor of his distinguished

grandsire, was rather too high-flown for garrison use. It was the name that now, however, his father much desired to have him called by. The playful pet name of his baby days, though still appropriate in the opinion of Fort Frayne, conveyed too little of the dignity that should hedge an officer's son, and the men of "B" Troop had already learned that they could easily find the soft side of their energetic commander by referring to the little boy as Master Roderick. Oddly enough, or perhaps characteristically enough, he being a boy with views of his own, the main obstacle to reformation in this respect lay with Rod himself, who stoutly maintained that Buster was the name he had first got to know himself by, the one he was accustomed to, and if they didn't want him called that, said he, why on earth did they ever give it to him? especially when he was a baby and knew no better. "Roderick sounds stuck-up," he added, with a pout, "and I like Buster best anyhow."

And this lovely June evening Buster had the blues. It was nearly nine o'clock and still faintly light. He had been out hunting gophers down the bluff all the summer morning, had been required by his devoted mother to take an afternoon nap, had slept through an important event, the arrival of a courier from the field column with a bagful of letters and a hatful of holes, and

now this gallant fellow, Downey by name, was lying in hospital faint with loss of blood, for one bullet had missed the hat and hit his shoulder, and still he had managed to outstrip his foes and ride to safety, though his gallant horse would never race again. What was of even greater consequence, however, Corporal Billy O'Toole, Buster's own particular friend and confidant, who had been sent in from the Crazy Horse fight in March with a fractured arm, and had been looking for a chance to get back to the command ever since his discharge from hospital, had volunteered to make the attempt to ride through the Indian scouting parties and carry despatches to the field column long two hundred miles away. It wasn't that Corporal Billy should be going on this desperate mission that made Buster miserable: it was that Billy couldn't and wouldn't take him too.

Like most army boys of those days, Buster had his Indian pony, and like not a few of their number, his own theories of Indian warfare and Indian character. These theories were not in all cases reliable, but they were no more absurd than those of many older and more influential citizens who lived farther from the Indians and nearer the powers at Washington. Buster believed his pony could best any Indian's pony, and he himself could lick any Indian except Crazy Horse. He drew the line at Chunka Wiltko, because Chunk

had outwitted a colonel and lots of cavalrymen that bitter cold day of the 17th of March, and was a splendid, daring, fighting warrior, who, perhaps, could get away with his weight in white men. "'Course," said Buster, "I don't mean I could fight a whole lot of Indians, but any one of them that got within reach of my gun would be dead before he could wink," and "my gun" was a diminutive target rifle which fired a pellet of lead the size of a quinine pill with remarkable accuracy for a distance of nearly fifty yards, and Buster shot straight, too, for a boy of nine. He had a famous imagination, had Buster, and not infrequently had come galloping into the post panting as hard as his pony, and frightening the little girls and boys in the neighboring quarters with tremendous tales of Indian war-parties swimming the Platte two miles up-stream or of signal smokes in the Medicine Bow, whose meaning he professed to read as readily as other boys could their primers. Yes, it must be admitted that when Buster was a little boy he told the biggest kind of sensational stories, but he believed them, or most of them, and he believed thoroughly in himself. Once when some Arapahoe Indians were camped on the flats down by the river, Billy O'Toole rode down with Buster and challenged some of the little Indian boys to shoot at a mark, and they did, and were badly beaten, for Buster

had a wonderfully keen eye and a steady hand, and both with bow and arrow and his little target rifle could shoot admirably. This exploit made him famous at the fort, for you may be sure that Corporal Billy lost no opportunity of dilating upon it in the presence of his *protégé's* devoted mother or in the hearing of his proud papa. Neither, for that matter, did Buster fall far behind when it came to telling of this archery contest, and other little boys were not a little envious, and other little boys' mothers wondered, you may be sure, how Captain and Mrs. Ross could let their only child spend so much time with uneducated, irresponsible persons like Corporal O'Toole, and in visiting Indian villages where everything was so dirty and disreputable. But Captain Ross did what few other fathers in old Fort Frayne did. Regularly every day, when he was not absent on duty, he took his little son for an hour's ride. Even in severe and stormy weather the big trooper on his pet Kentucky horse and the ruddy little son on his Indian pony would go trotting out of the garrison and come back glowing and healthful, and it was only when papa was away that Buster spent so much time with O'Toole. Besides, Corporal Billy was very proud of his charge, very careful of the boy—and his own language—when thus intrusted with his care. He taught him many things, too: how to ride bare-

back Indian-fashion, how to make the pony lie down, how to make him stand near by while Buster dismounted to shoot at sage-hens or occasional antelope (not that he ever got near enough to these latter to reach them with his tiny Ballard), how to make him swim the Platte or go up hill or down like a mountain goat. That pony, said Buster, knew more than any two horses at Fort Frayne, and a good deal more than any other boy's. O'Toole would have backed Buster to ride a race against any of the Indian urchins, but this Mrs. Ross forbade. She drew the line at further contests between Buster and the little breech-clouted heathen in the frowsy tepees down on the flats, and so the Arapahoes went away without getting a bet out of Billy in something they could do better than shoot, and that was ride. But Buster believed he would have won, and bragged accordingly, and as we shall see not entirely without reason, for the boy was a born horseman if nothing else, and well was it destined to help him in the hour of need.

Knowing, therefore, that he could shoot better than the Arapahoe boys, believing their boastful stories (Indians can out-brag any bipeds on earth) that they could out-shoot the Sioux, Buster's confidence extended still further, as we have seen. He believed he could shoot or ride as well as any of the young men in any of the tribes, and that

if it ever came to a fair fight with guns and pistols he could hold his own with the best of the red warriors provided they came singly, and stoutly maintained that he would be glad of a chance to show what he was made of.

And this particular night in June he was ready to cry his young heart out because Billy O'Toole was going to leave on this perilous mission and he was forbidden to say another word about going, too; for, just think of it, no sooner did he hear that the corporal was to go, this little scamp of a nine-year-old flew to his mother and demanded that he be allowed to accompany him and join his father in the field, which, of course, was utterly out of the question.

Nine o'clock had come. The old major commanding the post was saying a few parting words to the brave young Irish trooper who had come to report for orders before mounting. They were standing at the gate-way of the major's quarters, the adjutant in close attendance, one or two sympathizing fellows looking wistfully on from the porch of the adjutant's office across the dim, moonlit parade, a dozen army wives and daughters grouped about the neighboring piazzas, seeming to have no thought but for the husbands and fathers in the field and the courier who had thus offered himself for the perilous attempt to run the gauntlet through the intervening wilds. Their

soft voices were hushed, the ripple of their laughter, usually so blithe and merry, was stilled tonight, and the only sound that seemed to break the stillness of the broad expanse, between the snow-capped pinnacles of Cloud Peak far to the north and the black crests of the Medicine Bow to the southward, was the murmuring rush of the river over its stony bed and the distant yelp of the prairie-wolf, skulking among the sage brush on the other shore.

Gray-haired and yet sturdy and erect, the old soldier, it could be seen, was saying some low-toned words, probably of caution, to the trooper who stood respectfully at attention before him. Once or twice the major raised his hand as though to emphasize his words, and once he turned and pointed to where, unseen yet ever constant, the huge shoulders of the Big Horn range lay sleeping under the northern stars. And then from the direction of the cavalry stables a man came leading a saddled horse and stopped before the major's gate. "It's Buford," murmured one of the ladies, standing with Mrs. Ross on the veranda next to the commanding officer's. "He means to trust to speed entirely. See, he hasn't even a great-coat or blanket."

"No, and he doesn't carry a carbine," said Buster's mother. "Perhaps he's right. It would be of little use against the whole band. Buford's

heels are his best safety, and the less he has to carry the faster he can run. Why, he's mounting already."

True enough, as though wishing to avoid further words or farewells, O'Toole had brought his hand to his battered hat-brim in soldierly salute, faced about the instant the major had finished, and, merely strapping down the flap of his saddle-bags after inserting the last packet of letters he had received, threw his leg over Buford and turned to go. But even this little delay had given them time. Down they came, ladies and children, to wish him God-speed and good-by. It was the very thing poor Billy wanted to avoid, yet what could he do but stop, for kindly voices were calling his name and soft tear-dimmed eyes were gazing up at him.

"Now, do be cautious, corporal. Please run into no danger," were the words addressed him by one of the most impractical of all the girls at Frayne, as though she did not know that one could not so much as venture to the north bank of the stream without running imminent risk. At any other time all would have laughed at the incongruity of the words; now all were far too anxious and troubled.

"Never fear, ma'am, I'll get through all right," said Billy, trying hard to release the hand to which little Mary Crane, the major's twelve-year-

old daughter, was clinging. "Say good-by to Masther B—Roderick, ma'am, please; an' it's fine accounts I'll be givin' the captain of him four days from now."

And then for the first time it occurred to them that Buster was not there to bid his friend good-by. That was, indeed, extraordinary. "Where can he be?" said Mrs. Ross, in genuine alarm. "I left him on the sofa, in the sulks, not ten minutes ago; but it isn't possible he hasn't come out to say farewell to O'Toole."

Letting go the corporal's hand, Mary Crane and a little friend rushed at top speed into the Rosses' yard and up the steps. Another minute and one of them reappeared on the veranda. "He isn't anywhere here," she cried. "We've hunted every nook and corner." Then mamma ran in and joined them, and presently her voice could be heard loudly crying his name. No answer. Silence everywhere.

"I can't wait. I must go, ma'am," pleaded O'Toole to the lady who still held by the bridle. "I should have been out of sight across the Platte five minutes ago. Good-by now," he added; and then whirled his horse about, and in defiance of cavalry precedent and regulation, went cantering down the slope.

He carried neither carbine nor rifle, as has been remarked. He was weighted with no "prairie"

belt crammed with heavy copper cartridges. His saddle was a trimmed-down McClellan tree, devoid of straps for coats and blankets, but a pair of light saddle-bags hung from the cantle. A haversack with two days' supply of hard bread, bacon, coffee, salt, and sugar was swung on the left side, and a felt-covered canteen, a smoke-begrimed tin quart mug, and a stout lariat and picket-pin hung on the other. As for the corporal himself, his dress consisted of light shoes, Shoshone leggings, a pair of snugly-fitting cavalry breeches, as was the fashion of the day, dark-blue flannel shirt with rolling collar, and a knotted silk handkerchief at the throat, a battered felt scouting hat, a relic of the Apache campaigns, and not another sign of uniform about him. A light leather belt for pistol cartridges and his revolver holster swung at his waist, but even the gauntlets were discarded. Even the revolver was not so much for the foe in case he was cut off or run down. Terrible experiences had taught the officers and men of his regiment, and many another, that in warfare with our savage tribes the one thing that must never be allowed to happen was capture alive. The revolver was for himself, though its last shot was never meant to be turned heartward until some at least had been sent in face of the foe. The fearful hours of agonizing torture to which prisoners were subjected when captured by

the Indians of America no pen could well portray, and no man could read without horror the stories were they really told.

It was only a little after nine when the hoof-beats died away down the winding road that led to the ferry, where a bulky old scow did duty as ferry-boat, and was pulled to and fro across the Platte without loosing the grasp of her trolleys upon the heavy guy rope. Listening for a moment to the hearty voices of the garrison soldiers stringing along the roadside to bid adieu to their popular comrade of the cavalry, the anxious group of ladies and children clustered about the major and his young adjutant, while some of their number, with bowed head and tearful eyes, walked slowly home. Mrs. Ross had already gone. The moment it was announced that Buster was no longer in the little parlor she had hastened to search for him, and even as O'Toole rode sturdily away upon his perilous mission her voice, clear and ringing, yet plaintive in its evident anxiety, could be heard calling loudly for her boy. "Roddie! Roddie!" she cried, up and down stairs, out on the rear porch overlooking his own little playground, the back-yard. Then, candle in hand, she darted to the upper rooms, half praying, half hoping, she might find him, sobbing in wrathful petulance,—spoiled boy that he was,—in his own little bed. But it was unrumpled. The room

was dark and deserted. She ransacked the closet, peered under the furniture, still half believing that Buster might only be in hiding, but not a sign of Buster was there high or low about the house. Meantime, her old cook had joined the search, and was loudly proclaiming her indignation over the misconduct of her associate, half nurse, half housemaid, who, poor girl, was sobbing out her own heart down the bluff-side as her straining eyes took the last glimpse she believed they were to have of Billy O'Toole for many a long, long, weary month. Alas! in the light of her own bereavement, Kathleen had forgotten all about Buster. It was not until the sound of the creaking blocks of the ferry-scow was borne upward on the evening wind, telling her her gallant Irish lover was well on his way across the Platte, that poor Katty heard the clamor at the fort. Mrs. Ross, failing to find Roddie anywhere about the premises, had gone wildly weeping to the major, while Katty herself was brought to bay by her usually placid friend and ally, Cook. Then indeed was she frightened. The major's orderly had gone on the wings of the wind down the winding road, asking eagerly of every man had he seen anything of Buster,—all in vain. The adjutant had run, following a clue of his own, post haste to the troop stables, black, grim, and deserted now that their occupants were all absent

in the field, and just beyond had come upon the lone sentry pacing his post at the quartermaster's corral. "Seen anything of Captain Ross's little boy down here, sentry?" he panted.

"Not a sign, sir."

"Sure he hasn't taken out his pony and gone—anywhere?"

"Not since I came out, sir. I was posted only at dark, though."

The adjutant hurried on to the big barred gate and shook it violently, shouting for admission, but the word had gone the rounds that Billy O'Toole was to start at nine to try to ride through the Indians to the field column, and every man except the guard had dropped what he was doing and swarmed out on the roadside to see him off. Not until the bugle was sounding the mournful notes of tattoo did the adjutant succeed in getting the key and gaining admission to the corral, and, just as he expected, Buster's pretty Indian pony was gone. Fancy having to take *that* news to the now terrified mother!

The secret was soon out. Only a few minutes before O'Toole started, and while they were still saddling his horse for him at the corral, Master Roderick had slipped in, and without saying a word to the corporal in charge or his one assistant, had quietly saddled his pony and led him forth in the gathering dusk. Of course the corporal

noticed him when he came in and knew it was later than he had ever been there before, but everybody was excited about the post, he said, and he supposed Buster was too. It never occurred to him to look to see what he was doing. It never occurred to him to go and search the pony's stall. They were gone, boy and pony both, and that was all there was to it.

And no one knew where. A rush was made for the ferry, where stout old Pete Driscoll, a veteran of six enlistments, was in charge, and Pete swore solemnly that Buster had never come near there. Long since had Peter received orders never to take Buster across, and the boy knew that with the old soldier orders were orders. No, he had ridden away, and it was so dark by this time that no one as yet had found his trail. Search of the house disclosed that his Ballard was gone and his game-bag, his little haversack and canteen, also that a hole had been made in the supply of commissary crackers, and by this time Mrs. Ross was nearly frantic.

"For goodness' sake, my friend," said the major, soothingly, "don't take on so. You know perfectly well he can't get across the river. The stream is bank full everywhere, and there isn't a ford, up or down, for twenty miles. He'll be coming home tired and hungry inside of an hour, and then all you've got to do is spank him soundly

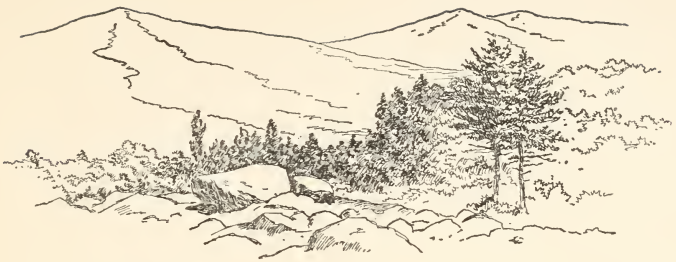
—I'll do it for you gladly—and then put him supperless to bed. Confound the little rascal! What wouldn't his father give him by way of punishment!"

"How can you talk of punishment, major!" protested Mrs. Ross, with streaming eyes. "I should be only too thankful to have my precious boy back again in my arms. Oh, the idea of his daring to run away in such a way! He'll try to make Beppo swim the river, I know he will. He has always declared he was going to make him, and it would be just like him to try it this night."

And then before the major could protest against the utter absurdity of such an idea, the corporal of the guard came running up to the steps.

"Major," said he, breathlessly, "Private Conners, sentry on Number Three, says he heard shots and saw flashes out on the prairie across the river——"

"Oh, I knew it! I knew it!" gasped Mrs. Ross. "They've killed my boy." And with that the poor distracted soul fainted helplessly away.



CHAPTER II.

The first thing the major did after seeing Mrs. Ross partially restored and in the hands of sympathizing lady friends was to hasten out to the post of the sentry on Number Three and closely question him as to the report brought in by the corporal of the guard. A sturdy young soldier was Private Connors and one who knew his duty well. "There can be no doubt about it, sir," he said, "I assure the major that I saw three flashes about half a mile above the ferry landing and as far to the north of the river. I could faintly hear the reports, too, and they sounded like rifles. Two were close together,—like that, sir," said he, quitting the small of the stock with his right hand as he stood at "port arms" and slapping twice the polished surface of its butt. "The other came perhaps five seconds later and was fainter, both in sound and in flash."

And the major's heart sank to his boots. Only that very afternoon, as has been told, the courier Downey had reached the post wounded, after a desperate ride. The Sioux had "jumped" him, as he said, on the Reno road about twelve miles out, and had never given up the chase until within three miles of the fort. Closer than that by day they dare not venture, for there were traditions among them of a fearful new gun the white soldiers had which could squirt a shower of bullets twice as far as their best rifles could carry,—a gun they didn't have to aim, only turn it in the direction of the enemy and it would spatter death all over the land and sweep them down like leaves torn from the cottonwoods in an autumn gale by the angry breath of the Great Spirit. But though they came no nearer then, the major knew they were hovering somewhere along that perilous path, probably as near as Trooper Springs, where the men so often filled their canteens when the cavalry were on scout. Alas! He had no cavalry now to send out after these fleet marauders—nothing but an infantry guard, and no way of mounting them beyond a dozen mules, ponies, and worn-out troop horses in the quartermaster's corral. The Indians knew this as well as he, and felt entirely safe in camping for the night somewhere among the sheltered nooks in the valley of Trooper Fork, a clear, cold, sparkling stream that came winding

down towards the river from the heights to the north-west. "I'll mount under the low bluff across the Platte, sir," O'Toole had said before he rode away, "follow up-stream about half a mile, so as to be well to the west of the road, and then strike out across the prairie for Eagle Butte." And the major had no better plan to suggest. Down-stream and to the east he could have found a country more open, perhaps, but it was a longer way. It was cut up by numerous deep valleys, all of which led eastward, the direction of the reservations, and therefore likely to be the lurking-places of braves by the dozen, watching for a chance to swoop upon the road.

Up the river, therefore, O'Toole had undoubtedly gone, then out across the open prairie, and he had been gone quite long enough to reach the point described by the sentry as that from which came the sound of the shots. The moon was young and feeble, already low in the west, and casting but a faint, pallid light over the broad waste of rolling prairie across the stream; so little further could be seen. With all his heart the major had hoped to find in the sentry some nervous, sensational fellow,—a grown-up edition of Buster himself, perhaps. He found instead a cool, self-possessed, soldierly man whose words and bearing commanded his respect, and there was no hesitation whatever in the major's action now.

"Mount ten men on anything you can find in the corral," said he to the quartermaster, who was standing silently by his side; "and, Warner, you will go in command."

A young lieutenant touched his cap and turned quickly away. "Lend me your horse, Billy," he said to the quartermaster, as he hurried to his quarters to get his arms. And then sharp and clear the bugle-notes of the assembly rang out upon the evening air. The men, gathered but a few minutes before for tattoo roll-call, as was the custom at that time, were already at their barracks and quick to spring to ranks. Only Sergeant Curran was missing. He had gone with the adjutant full tilt for the ferry at the first assurance of Buster's disappearance.

By this time the heavy old scow was moored to the south bank again,—Driscoll, the ferryman, and the brace of infantry soldiers who had gone with him as guard, hardly caring to remain longer than was necessary so far from under the protection of the fort. What was to prevent a squad of a dozen Indians dashing down upon them in the gloaming and murdering every man before help might come? What but the fact that most Indians are superstitious and as afraid of the dark as many a school-boy. True, the soldiers had their Springfields and the old ferryman his repeating rifle, and all three had had more than

one brush with savage foes. All the same, it was nervous work, this pulling slowly over in the silence, broken only by the lapping of the stream upon the sloping bows of the clumsy craft, the creak of pulley, or some murmured word of admonition. In that dim, ghostly, uncertain light men see shapes that become goblins damned or Indians vengeful to the excited brain, and the fact that, only two nights before, somewhere out there on the prairie an Indian had lurked and shouted sonorous boastings and challenge across the stream, as though tempting the far-away sentry to fire, served to make the trio more cautious than usual. They were still there at the old ferry-house when the adjutant, close followed by Sergeant Curran, bore swiftly down upon them, and they were evidently startled by the sudden, excited coming. The first question was, of course, of Buster: had anything been seen of him? to which, of course, the answer was no. Then, had they heard or seen anything from up-stream, the direction taken by O'Toole? Not a sight, not a sound. They were amazed when told of the firing.

"But I believe it, sir," said one of the guards. "Indeed, I might have expected it. Corporal O'Toole's horse was that excited, sir, that he almost backed off the boat. He was staring and snorting all the way over, and pricking up his

ears and pulling back. The corporal said he had never seen him act so but once before, and that was the morning they came in sight of Crazy Horse's village last March."

But they were overcome with consternation when told that little Roderick was missing,—had taken his pony and provisions and ridden away no one knew where. Excitedly, and in low, eager tones, they continued to chat and conjecture, while the adjutant turned and ran swiftly back up the slope to convey this last intelligence to his commander.

"Stand by your scow!" he shouted back. "She'll be wanted in a few minutes to carry the patrol across." And, surely enough, in just about ten minutes down through the gloaming they came, the boy lieutenant, Warner, and perhaps a dozen soldiers on all manner of mounts, but all the riders silent, eager, resolute. Quickly the leader dismounted and led down the steep ramp to where the scow swung uneasily at her moorings. The others, following the lieutenant, led their steeds aboard, not without some sharp urging in some cases, one little mule in particular that braced all four feet and refused to budge until a bayonet prick, followed by a resounding whack from the butt of a rifle, sent the obstinate brute sputtering down the muddy slope and plunging in among the quadrupeds on deck. Then willing

hands grasped the guy-ropes, and the heavily-laden craft a second time breasted the stream, and full a quarter of all Fort Frayne's available garrison was launched upon the waves and sent in search of Buster,—Buster who could only by any possible chance have crossed the stream by swimming his pony over in the dark, which mighty few boys of nine would dare to do, or else by stumbling across the rocky ford a mile away up-stream.

Yet the sounds of fight had come from the northern side, and some distance away, and while it might mean an attack on O'Toole, it might still mean, as poor Mrs. Ross declared, that the savages had attacked and killed her precious baby boy.

Meanwhile, another squad, just a sergeant and three men, had started out afoot to follow the right bank of the stream westward, with orders to search and signal everywhere. Another, still, went down-stream; not that any one believed Buster had gone that way, but because he might have done so, and no stone was to be left unturned in the effort to trace him. Meantime, too, surrounded by her closest friends in the little garrison, Mrs. Ross was striving hard to be calm and hopeful and courageous, feeling ashamed already of her weakness in fainting away just when her wits were most needed. Yet what mother could be calm under such fearful strain? Other women

at first had suggested that it was all some trick of Buster's,—"some utterly abominable, inexcusable freak," they said to themselves or to one another, as they thought of a dozen places where he and Beppo might be hiding, but these places were searched, and not a sign of the boy was found, not a print of Beppo's hoofs. But neither these theories nor their failure detracted one whit from the poor mother's distress. From the very first she had never doubted that the boy was really gone, and before the wailing notes of taps had died away at ten came tidings that banished doubt and hope at one and the same time. In the soft sand of the river bottom, not five hundred yards above the post, they had found fresh imprint of Beppo's hoofs. Every soldier knew them, and it was evident that in two places the boy had striven to force him to enter the stream. Then, as both times Beppo had refused and backed out, they had gone on westward towards the ford,—a ford bad enough at noonday and at low water, but now dangerous for horse and almost certain death to a pony and such a pygmy rider. One of the men had come back with the tidings of the finding of the hoof-prints; the others had followed on up-stream.

Incredible as it might seem, then, this nine-year-old infant had made up his mind to escape from Frayne that very night and make his way

far to the north through the Indian-haunted wilds with his friend O'Toole, and join his father in the field beyond the beautiful snow-capped mountains of the Big Horn.

And now while all was suspense and eagerness at the fort and dread anxiety at Captain Ross's home, the major returned to his post on the bluff close to the sentry, and, with his adjutant and a veteran captain of infantry in close attendance, stood almost breathlessly waiting for the next sign or sound from the dark prairie across the stream. Even at the point where the ferry-boat was moored to the northern bank all was dark as the bottom of a well, and not a sound broke the stillness of the night. There crouched the old ferry-man and his two guards, listening intently for the return of the first messenger from the searching-party, and warily scanning the low bank that loomed up against the stars of the northern sky, watching for signs of war-bonnet or unadorned Indian head. Out at the northward end of the bluff half a dozen soldiers, rifle in hand, had grouped in silence, watching, waiting like their superiors. Others still clung at the edge of the steep bank just below the point where the major watched, the murmur of some whisper or low-toned question and reply floating once in a while to the ears of those higher up the bank. Over at the officers' quarters vague, womanly shapes

seemed flitting to and fro along the piazzas, passing rapidly from house to house, and occasionally the sob of some nervous, frightened child added to the gloom of the situation. Five, ten, fifteen, minutes they waited, and not a sign came from the front,—no further word from up-stream.

At last a young soldier came. He was running slowly, heavily, wearily. The major turned impatiently towards him. "Well, what news?" he queried.

"He's gone, sir; leastwise he's tried the ford, and he never came out again on this side. The pony made a fight against going in among the rocks, but there's no signs above or below. Whether he got across or not I cannot say. The only thing certain is that he got in, sir."

"Are you sure there are no back tracks?" asked the major, almost imploringly.

"Not for two hundred yards above or below, major. Indeed, it's too dark to see and too deep above and below for them to get back if swept off the ledge of rocks."

The major wrung his hands in silence a moment. It was a hard time for him, for had he not promised Ross he would take the best care of that precious youngster ere the father went away? and now here he had the whole garrison on tenterhooks about the boy, and all because the wilful, fearless little scamp had not been watched and

prevented from taking out his pony. If he and Beppo were drowned in the Platte as the result of this night's work, he'd never dare look in Ross's face again; and if the boy had really crossed, had actually gotten over to the northward side and then been nabbed by Indians,—God have mercy on him and on the negligent men who had let him slip away!

Not daring to face the mother now, Crandall sent his adjutant, as he had promised, to tell as gently, as hopefully as he could the latest news, and no man envied Mr. White his mission.

And now it was high time something had been heard from the searching-party on the north shore. Well they knew that the moment Warner discovered evidence, good or bad, he would hasten to communicate with the fort. In the little party that rode away under his command was the orderly bugler, a boy of seventeen, a good deal of a scamp, too, in his way, and, as need be no matter of surprise, a stanch friend in consequence of Buster's. Just as they were starting, and the major was giving his hurried instructions, a happy thought occurred to him.

"If by any chance you should find Buster over there and all's right, tell Lanigan to gallop back and sound a bar or two of the reveille as soon as he thinks he can make it heard at the post. That's the brightest, liveliest call of the lot. If

it's O'Toole you find, and he needs help, sound sick-call. If you can find nothing of either of them, sound 'taps,' and we'll know what to prepare Mrs. Ross for. You understand?" And Warner had nodded appreciatively and spurred away.

They had been gone full thirty minutes, long enough to have reached the point whence came the shots and flashes twice over again, and not a sound had come from the front. All eyes now were peering out to the north-west, as though striving to pierce that impenetrable darkness. Hearts were beating heavily, thumping like little trip-hammers in the brawny chests of these veteran soldiers. Only in whispers dared they utter even an occasional word for fear of missing that longed-for bugle-call. Down in the depths at the foot of the bluff the river went murmuring over its changeful bed, lashing the rocks at the sharp bend down-stream, and tossing little waves upon the shallows under the cottonwoods on the "bench" below the fort. Over on the major's piazza some one was walking nervously up and down, and he sent a messenger begging whoever it was to be quiet, so severe was the nervous tension among the listeners at the bank.

And so thirty minutes passed away, and others of the searchers on the southern bank returned, reporting no signs. Some one called attention to

a faint light flickering like a will-o'-the-wisp away up-stream, and some one else said that Sergeant Curran had a lantern and was studying the shore above the ford in vain search for more of Beppo's tracks. The sergeant would not give up hope; he still believed the boy would turn up somewhere along that bank, but the quartermaster sadly shook his head.

"What I dread," muttered he, "is that the poor little chap has dared the ford at the rocks,—he and Beppo crossed it often last fall when the water was low,—and the pony has stumbled and thrown him, and they've been swept into that black pool below the rapids. The moon was so low and faint even before tattoo that they couldn't have picked their way among those slippery rocks."

"But Beppo could swim like a spaniel," protested the major. "Ross took me down once to that very pool to see the little beggar paddle through it. O'Toole used to drag him in alongside his big bay until he seemed to like it. He swam high, too, with his withers 'way out of water, and if Buster could only hang on—— My heavens! Is that bugle never going to sound?"

And just then the sentry slowly pacing by them, his eyes fixed on that dim, desolate waste across the waters, stopped suddenly. There were low excited words among the watchers farther up the bank. "What is it? What do you hear?"

were the breathless questions of the officers, and for answer the sentry pointed north-westward. Far out under the stars a faint, ruddy light had suddenly popped into view, easily distinguishable from the pallid, phosphorescent, bluish twinkle of the northern heavens,—a tiny red-yellow button on the black robe of night that hovered and waxed and waned and waxed again and grew broader and bigger, and then began to illumine the rugged outline of the heights, and men's hearts began to throb with hope and relief as presently a waving tongue of flame could be seen creeping higher, and the orderly came running out with the major's signal-glasses, and the cry went up, "O'Toole's all right! It's a signal from Eagle Butte!"

And then came even greater dread than before. If O'Toole had reached the butte in safety across that intervening league of open prairie, what could have become of Buster? If the corporal had found him across the river he would long since have brought him back, unless their return had been cut off by prowling Indians. Under no circumstances would the faithful Irishman have taken the little fellow with him on his way. If that little beacon had been fired that night by Billy O'Toole,—a trick they had learned from the Indians themselves, and often used in the old days of hunting-parties returning to the post as warning

of their coming,—it meant that he was there, safe and sound and unmolested, for were Indians after him there would have been no time to stop and gather pine and fir branches and heap them in that little niche which, opening only to the southward, concealed its flame from other points and signalled only towards the Platte. The more they thought and reasoned, the more the officers knew it couldn't be fired by the courier who had left them so short a time before. What earthly object would he have had in signalling if he were unpursued? If Indians were south of the Butte, it would betray him instantly. And then reaction set in; the sudden flutter of hope and joy gave place to newer, deeper anxiety, and even as they looked speechlessly at one another, wondering what this might portend, away over across that northward stretch of barren, rolling, night-shrouded prairie there came a cry, querulous, complaining, mournful, weird, and one after another a pack of vagrant coyotes lifted up their voices to the winds of night and began their unearthly serenade, and then that, and the tiny blaze among the crags at Eagle Butte and the flutter of hope that had sprung for the moment in every heart, all seemed to die away together, and men could only look blankly in one another's worn faces and whisper, "What can it mean?"

"I never want to live over again two such

minutes as followed that fire," said the major, a day or two later, "and I never knew anything like the darkness and depression that settled over the old fort."

But that was just the darkest hour that precedes the radiant dawn. Two woful, dreadful minutes of suspense and misery were theirs, and then once again, and this time with no reaction, every heart along that northern slope bounded anew and beat with exultant joy, for, faint and tremulous at first, but rising fuller, surer, gladder with every second, there came floating through the night the ringing, rollicking notes of the soldier's reveille,—"Buster's found, thank God!" went up the cry, as strong men clasped hands, and two fleet-footed fellows dashed away to bear the news to Mrs. Ross. "Buster's found, thank God!" they shouted to the weeping women at the quarters across the parade. Then—hark! Another peal, faint, yet clear, imperative, unmistakable,—Bugler Lanigan was sounding sick-call.

Buster was safe, and O'Toole needed help. Who, then, could have fired the beacon at Eagle Butte?

CHAPTER III.

And now, as this is Buster's story, it might be only fair to let him tell some part of it himself. But the trouble with Buster, as has been said, was that he was a boy gifted with not a little imagination for a nine-year-old, and that he had rather impaired his credibility as a witness by exaggerative, not to say unreliable, statements in the past. To such an extent was our sturdy little friend believed to color his narratives that his very pet name had become a sort of synonyme at Frayne for garrison tales of doubtful veracity. "That's what I call a buster," was the quartermaster's remark when he heard a typical frontiersman telling how many Indians he had killed since the Fort Phil Kearny massacre. "That's a buster" became a post expression as significant at Frayne as was "that's a whopper" among school-boys.

And yet people laughed not unkindly when they said it, for Buster's tales of personal prowess

had this to back them,—that he believed he could do everything he said he did do, and as his courage and nerve had often been tried, the officers, at least, felt sure the little man would "take chances" to make good his word. Among the post children there were the same lively jealousies and heart-burnings to be found among those very human little people in similar sets at home, but, as luck would have it, Buster was the only boy of the age of nine in all the fort. There were older boys, bigger boys, and mites of boys, but none just suited to be his playmate; so when his father was in the field Buster was rather alone in the world, after all, were it not for Billy O'Toole and Lanigan and Beppo, for Buster affected to despise girls. He couldn't bear it that twelve-year-old Mary Crandall should sometimes try to order him about. He became obstreperous if his ex-nurse ventured to exert authority. That was all very well until he was five years old, said he, but a boy who could ride and swim and shoot wasn't to be bossed by any girl, and he wouldn't stand it.

And now that Lanigan's bugling assured the garrison that Buster was safe, even before he knew what might have befallen O'Toole, or before any one could explain the meaning of the mysterious signals from Eagle Butte, the grim quartermaster remarked, "Only fancy the story Buster will have to tell now!"

And the little man did not entirely disappoint his critics and detractors. Not until eleven o'clock that night was he safely restored to his mother's arms, and to her and to the crowd of inquisitive neighbors did he deign again and again to tell his experiences. The men meantime were getting what they could out of Billy O'Toole, who was back once more, this time with a broken leg. As for their respective "mounts," little Beppo, looking as though he had been rolling in the slough, was now setting his ears back and biting at his groom in the comfort and seclusion of the stall, while with wisps of hay he was being vigorously rubbed down, and as for poor Buford, he would never race again. We'll hear O'Toole's story first.

Half a mile north-west from the ferry, soon after the gallant fellow had ridden out from the shelter of the low bluff and was bounding away over the turf, two rifles flashed their greetings from over a little ridge less than thirty yards away. Buford plunged, swerved, staggered, and plainly showed that he had received his death wound. The only hope was, could he hold out long enough to bear his rider back to the bank, and gallantly, faithfully, had he obeyed the almost frantic summons. Whirling about, O'Toole headed him for the stream, and was sore amazed when out from the shadowy slope ahead there came a sudden flash

and a sharp report. "My God," thought he, "they've headed me!" but Buford tore frantically on, and fell, all in a heap, close to the water's edge, with Corporal Billy underneath. By the time he, poor fellow, had worked himself out from under the cruel weight, he was conscious of a voice, in clear, childish treble, calling his name, and there, by all that was wonderful!—there, Ballard in hand, and Beppo towing sulkily behind, there came little Buster, trotting to him down the bank. And both Buster and Beppo were dripping wet.

And then poor O'Toole was in worse plight than before. It was bad enough to be lying there helpless and in mortal pain with his pet horse just stiffening in death, thwarted, defeated, and driven back before he had got a mile on his way with those precious letters and despatches. It was bad enough to lie there not knowing what instant the hated, triumphant savages would reappear, creeping slowly into view over that nearest bank and making a target of him as he lay there powerless, finishing him from behind their natural breastworks before venturing down to claim his scalp. It was bad enough to lie there crippled and with no better weapon than his revolver, but what had he ever done that here there should suddenly appear, claiming his protection, the only child of the captain he so loyally loved, the little son Billy

had so proudly promised the father to guard as he would his own life? "Oh, murther, murther, Roddie boy, what villain let you across the river?" he moaned aloud, and then was utterly amazed,—startled out of all remembrance of his own pain and terror, by the utterly unexpected answer.

"Huh! Guess you've forgotten how Bep could swim. That's how we got across,—just in time, too, or you'd never ha' got away from those Indians."

"Mother of Heaven, boy! what are you saying? You swam the Platte,—*you?*"

"*I* didn't,—I could though easy enough,—Bep did. All I had to do was to stick on; but you ought to have seen that Indian light out when I fired. I shot him, I'm sure I did!" cried the boy, mad with excitement and big with importance. "They was two of them came a-chasing after you and I took good aim, and you ought to have seen them make tracks!"

"Roddie, it's dreaming you are, or it's crazy I am! Sure you could never make Bep swim the Platte by day; how could you do it in the dark? As for shootin', I heard ye, and thought 'twas me you was firing at and you was another Indian. Roddie, ye don't mane it. Did ye hit him?"

"*Hit* him? Of course I did!" vowed Buster, stoutly, though dripping and beginning to shiver

with cold and excitement. "He went down on his pony's neck like that," said he, bowing low.

"Then crawl behind poor Buford here, you young limb, and lay low, or they'll pick you off instead of me. Don't be frightened, boy," he added, seeing how little Rod's teeth were chattering and the boy was trembling as though in a fit of ague. "The fellers'll come galloping out from the fort in a few minutes if we can only stand off the blackguards meantime. Bedad, I believe you did hit him or they'd have been here now."

And this was Buster's firm conviction, too, and one that grew with every minute as time went on and never an Indian feather appeared. On the contrary, the new moon sank behind the low horizon; O'Toole managed to unstrap his big canteen from the saddle and drink a long, refreshing draught and to unsling the cincha and wrap the saddle blanket about his little friend and cuddle him close up against poor Buford's still warm body, and all the time he kept wary eye upon the low bluff line, watching for foemen, listening for friends, and by the time he grew a little warmer Buster believed he had killed that Indian stone dead and the others had dragged the body off. And then, far out over the prairie, they heard the sound of hoofs and voices, and presently a bugle call, and then they let drive a shot or two from the revolver, and both Irish barytone and

boyish treble went up in a shout, and by the time the rescuers came galloping in, Roderick Buster Ross firmly believed and was ready to declare that he had killed both Indians and put to rout a dozen.

Whether that little pill of a bullet ever hit either one of those pursuing Sioux is very doubtful, but the fact that the lone horseman had turned and darted back, and that he had at least one friend in that direction, was quite enough for the warriors in the case. Cavalry on the march always had a little advance guard, preceded something like one hundred yards by a single horseman. Very possibly this horseman had darted back to his supports, it was one of these latter who had fired, and the Indians lost no time in circling about and getting a mile away. Very probably Buster's little pill of a bullet would hardly have stung an Indian at the distance, but the flash and report were enough for them, when awed by darkness, too, and they fled from dangers they knew not of.

But that one shot, fired perhaps blindly, excitedly, desperately, made a hero of Buster Ross. All the way back to the scow, in tones of wonderment and admiration commingled, Warner's party plied the little chap with questions, and his boyish voice rose shrill on the night air as again and again he repeated his story. "I was bound to catch O'Toole," he said, "an' the moment Bep

struck bottom on the other side we galloped out towards the road, an' before we were half-way across the prairie I heard the shots an' saw him a-coming an' the Indians after him, an' I just took good aim as ever I took in my life at the headmost buck, an' waited till they were almost on top of me before I fired, an' he went right down on his pony's neck——"

"Well, of all the army boys I ever heard of you take the cake," muttered Mr. Warner. "Either you're the littlest big hero or the biggest little liar that ever lived! Why, half an hour ago I was for having him soundly thrashed and put to bed for scaring his mother and the rest of us out of our seven senses, but I'll be switched if he hasn't done the pluckiest thing I ever heard of in a boy in all my life."

Certainly that was O'Toole's opinion. They had to bear him along very slowly, but he could talk of nothing but Buster and Buster's exploit, and Warner went ahead with the little man, Beppo readily consenting to a rapid gait, as it was homeward now, and there at the ferry landing was Mrs. Ross, weeping with excitement and rejoicing, and her anxiety forgotten, and all sense of proper indignation at Buster's outrageous misconduct banished by the story of his exploit. A wonderful night they had at Frayne while the mother and one or two sympathetic souls with her were

giving the bantling his warm bath and trying to still his excitement and hush his tongue and get him to go to sleep, but over at the hospital where the doctor was setting Corporal Billy's leg, and out on the bluffs again where Major Crandall with his officer of the day was seeking explanation of that signal-fire at the Butte, and along among the parlors and piazzas of officers' row, the talk was of the wonderful pluck—or sense—or something, which prompted that little rascal to a deed that was to resound throughout the whole army. "That he should fire when he saw those Indians coming I can understand easily enough," said the major. "That was the obvious—the natural thing to do, since escape would have been impossible on Beppo, but what gets me is, how the mischief he got across the river, and that's something only he and Beppo know and that Beppo won't tell."

And not until long, very long after, when he had grown several years older and wiser, did Buster tell the real truth about that escapade and how he came to cross the Platte, but we may as well have the story now while waiting and watching for explanation of that sign at the Butte. Fort Frayne couldn't go to bed until every man and woman in it had talked over the stirring narrative of Corporal O'Toole and the marvellous doings of Master Roderick Ross. Nor could they sleep until something came to explain that strange,

unlooked-for signal. Once more had Warner, with half a dozen men at his back, ridden cautiously out north-westward, crossing the now pitch-dark prairie in long extended line so as to discover, if a possible thing, any human being approaching from the direction of the Butte. Only a mile or so were they bidden to go, for the major did not mean to run the risk of having a part of his little garrison cut off and surrounded in the open field. If the signal came from friends, who merely wanted to herald their own approach, they might need aid through running into the same party of Indians, two of whose number had striven to kill O'Toole. Therefore Warner was sent to reconnoitre and watch and listen, and while we are waiting for his report we will hear Buster's story as told after he had grown old enough to be ashamed of exaggeration and to despise a lie.

"I was all broken up," he said, "about O'Toole's going. He had sometimes talked of taking me with him when he went, and I had bragged to all the boys and girls at Frayne that I was going, and made them believe I was, and made myself believe it, too, and when I thought how they'd laugh and jeer next day I couldn't stand it. It made me miserable, desperate, and I made up my mind I'd saddle Beppo and try to cross up-stream. You know that I never was afraid of the dark as a boy, and out of sheer mischief used to run all

over the post just to hide from nurse and mother. I really meant to go with O'Toole. I felt sure I could ride as long and fast as he could, even on Bep, and so I took my rifle and saddle-bags and hid them down under the west bluff, and crammed some eatables in the haversack and stole down to the corral and got Bep saddled, and sneaked out with him while they were saddling Buford. Then I led him quietly out into the moonlight, got my duds and strapped them on the saddle, and then I galloped Bep up to the first bend. The moon was low, but I could see across easily there, and drove Bep in until up to his chest, and then he fought and backed out. So he did farther up, and I found it was of no use, he wouldn't swim, so I thought of the ford at the rapids. It's almost dry in midsummer. We had crossed there dozens of times, but I never knew it boiling high as it was that night. At first it was shallow and only up to his belly. Then it got deeper, and then shallowed up again. We pushed ahead all right until we were more than half-way across, and then came the big bowlders and the deep, swift water, and the first thing I knew Bep was swept off his feet, and away we went sailing down into the pool. I tell you I was scared nearly dead, but I had sense enough to cling tight to the mane. We went clear under once, up to my chest, and I thought we were gone, and you bet I cried out,

but Bep struck out like a little spaniel for the shore and I stuck on, and the next thing I knew he was wading again, in mud too, and then I thought of quicksands, and got another awful scare when he began plunging and bucking, and at last landed me, wet to the skin, but safe and sound, on the north bank. Then I just had to strike out to find O'Toole, for there was no getting back the way we came, and I never thought of Indians coming in so close up west of the road where the prairie was open, and then, after we'd gone out a little distance, I heard Buford's hoofs and the shots, and then he came a-running. I was almost frozen stiff with fright at the minute, and without ever looking to see what was coming fired desperately at the dim shapes that were galloping towards us, and then Bep and I went for all we were worth. Buford veered and ran for the bank and past us, going on out of sight, and I thought we were lost, but Bep galloped on as though a million Indians were coming, and at last I saw the shining water just ahead and came to the steep bank, and there on the shore below lay Billy and poor Buford, and I jumped off and led Beppo down, and then as the Indians didn't come I began to see what a tremendous influence that one shot from that pop-gun of mine had had, and upon my word I began to believe I must have shot one of those Indians instead of Billy, and then he

made such a fuss over me and they all made such a fuss that I grew to think that there wasn't an Indian fighter on the frontier that could hold a candle to Buster Ross, and that's the whole truth. If Bep hadn't been swept off his feet he wouldn't have swam at all, and I couldn't have made him, and as he had to swim or drown, he put out for the nearest shore and took me along. Our getting over was the biggest kind of an accident, but I made the most of it and swore we swam, which was partially true,—we'd have drowned if we hadn't."

And that was how Rod Ross got his start in what proved to be an eventful boyhood, and led on to the life in which, as a mere stripling, he won distinction many an elder envied him. But on this particular night in June it must be admitted that he deserved a larruping, and a sound one, about as much as any little scamp in America, and Buster's friend, the major, was thinking of this and how he would ever be able to face Ross, the father, on his return from the campaign, when the first news came from the party far out on the northward prairie and put Buster and Buster's doings for the time being utterly into the shade.

It was just as the sentry at the guard-house began the midnight call of "Number One, Twelve o'clock," that the new sentry on Number Three

sang out to the little group of officers, "Something coming, major. I can hear galloping hoofs." Five minutes later a horseman was being ferried over, and in ten was dismounting at the major's side.

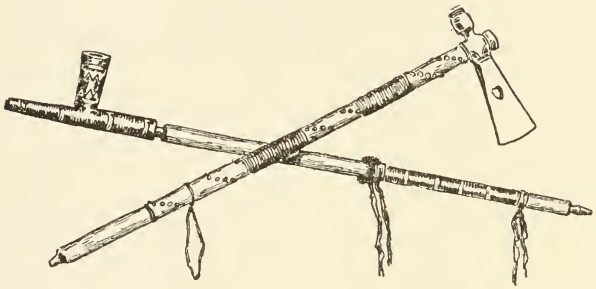
"Lieutenant Warner's compliments, sir," said he, "and he wants permission to push ahead another mile or so. We can hear distant firing at intervals, and he is sure the Indians have got a little party corralled at the Butte and that that signal was for help."

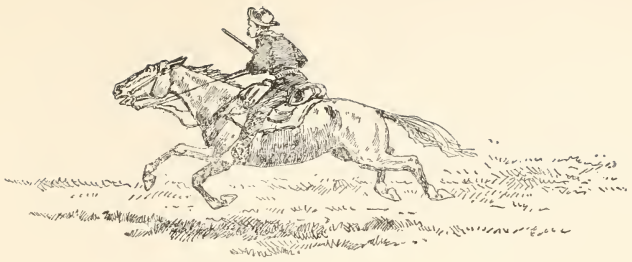
Major Crandall was a brave man,—a cool, resolute old campaigner. No one had ever heard of his failing in his duty or would accuse him of neglect of comrades in their hour of need, but the major hesitated now, and well he might. Only a few years before, only a few days' march away around the shoulder of those beautiful Big Horn mountains to the north, a post commander like himself, with women and children to guard like himself (but with half a dozen companies at his disposal, while Crandall had only one), sent out a little detachment one day to protect the men engaged in chopping wood for the winter supply. The sentries reported sounds of firing, and word was brought in that reinforcements were needed, as some Indians had "jumped" the wood-cutters, and they were too many for the few soldiers out there among the pines. Three companies were

hastily assembled, and marched jauntily forth to make short work of those marauding Sioux. Women and children watched husbands and fathers march away with only slight anxiety. What could a few beggarly braves do in face of such a force of regulars as these? But though the wood-choppers they marched to rescue and the comrades they were sent to relieve were barely two miles off, that confident little battalion never came back. Once well out of range of the stockade, there rose up as from the teeming earth, like the clansmen of Roderick Dhu, from every ravine and swale, from behind every ridge and point, group after group of savage warriors, full panoplied, the entire fighting force of the renowned Ogallalla chieftain Red Cloud, and out upon a narrow ridge, almost in full view of the now horror-stricken wives and children at old Fort Phil Kearny, Major Fetterman and his command were slowly massacred until not one was left to tell the tale.

Then how could Major Crandall say the word that should send even a single platoon of his one company five miles away through the darkness of night, and leave only a beggarly squad to defend in case of need the women and children of old Fort Frayne. No wonder his heart sank within him as he listened to the appeal of his young subaltern, eager to push ahead to the res-

cue, yet restrained by his orders. No wonder the hoarse words rose to his lips, "God help them!—I cannot—I dare not. Who could defend these women and children here if my men were slaughtered there?"





CHAPTER IV.

Whenever a disaster occurs it is the first impulse of the populace to wreak summary vengeance on some supposably responsible party. Somebody must be to blame, and people at first seem to care little who that somebody may be, provided they can relieve their minds by upbraiding him for the misfortune that has occurred to others. It was thus the first impulse of the critics when they heard of the Fetterman massacre to lavish abuse upon and demand the punishment of the commanding officer of the post because he had not sent out the rest of his little command to the succor of the half that was already gone. This was precisely what Red Cloud hoped and planned that he should do, as in that event the women and children would be left to the tender mercies of himself and his braves, while their defenders were being slowly butchered by overpowering hundreds of well-armed warriors out on the open hill-sides. Luckily,

the Indian plan became apparent as soon as it was seen that the Sioux were in strong force, and though it wrung his heart-strings to refuse the appeals of some officers and men to be allowed to go and do what they could to save their comrades, the colonel refused, and was right.

And now, this still June midnight, Major Crandall was confronted by a somewhat similar problem. True, there was nothing definite as yet to prove that friends were signalling for help from Eagle Butte. That striking landmark stood full seven miles west of the Reno trail, far off the line of travel. Downey, the courier, who had ridden through at such peril to his life the previous day, declared that no detachment from the field column was out in that direction. There was absolutely no other post or party from which such detachment could have come, and the more the major and his officers thought of it, the more they believed that it was all part and parcel of an Indian plan to lure the little garrison out towards the butte, then to surround and slowly shoot it down, as was done at Kearny years before, and then help themselves to all that was left at the defenceless fort across the stream. Oh, what rich spoil was there! What glorious revel in fire and blood and rapine would they not enjoy! What food for years and years of boastings and exultation about the village lodges,—around the fires at the

war-dance! On every account, therefore, Crandall's decision seemed to be the proper one.

But the young sergeant who brought Warner's message was a soldier who had enlisted to make a name for himself, and win, if possible, his way to a commission. He listened respectfully to the major's decision, and yet ventured another appeal.

"The lieutenant feared that the orders couldn't be changed, sir," said he, as he stood there sturdily at attention, the dim light of the corporal's lantern striking on his clear-cut face, "and he, too, thought of its being an Indian trick; but if it were, sir, wouldn't they have been apt to keep up the fire or to repeat the signal when they saw that we didn't come? If Indians are trying to lure us farther out from the fort, some of them must be hanging about that little party out there on the prairie, and, noting that they have halted and that they seem undecided, wouldn't it be natural to do a little more firing, or to start up the beacon again?"

Crandall turned and studied the sergeant's face, a deep shade of anxiety on his own. "I own I have been expecting the signal-fire to start again;" said he, "and was there no firing after you finally halted?"

"Only a far-away shot or two, sir, nothing else. We lay and listened some time before I was sent in. We distinctly heard scattered shots just as soon as we got far enough away to lose the sound

of the rush of the river, and—I beg the major's pardon—but the one reason why that fire hasn't been repeated, it seems to me, is, that some white men are corralled in the rocks and can't get more fuel. Indians could get all they want and carry it into that cleft and start up a blaze any time, and so could white men if Indians weren't all around them."

"I appreciate all that, sergeant," said the major, while the infantry captain nodded, as much as to say, "That's one of my non-coms,—a fine specimen of what we carry in 'C' Company." And then the major looked again long and anxiously out to the north-west. "The main point against that theory is the utter improbability of any white men, soldiers or scouts, being out in that direction. Downey says no detachment is scouting south of Crazy Woman's Fork, and no parties have been allowed to hunt in the Big Horn. Then, who could it be?"

"I can't say, sir, unless—the major knows some of the men volunteered to try to work their way through the Indian country to the Yellowstone and find General Gibbon's camp that ought to be there somewhere. Suppose some of those men got headed off along the Big Horn River and put back west of the mountains because the Sioux got between them and the main body of our people. Then that's the direction from which they would

come trying to put in here for rations. It may be some of our own men, sir. Some of Captain Ross's troop perhaps. They've got that near home only to be corralled by Indians at the last."

"By heaven, Sergeant Decker, you may be right, and a few men can reach them easier by night than by day if Indians are their only besiegers. At all events, the post is safe for the night, perhaps, and we can let a few men venture to try and open communication. Do you wish to be one?" he asked, as though sure of the answer.

"Certainly, sir; and the lieutenant says he wishes to go, and Sergeant Curran, and, for that matter, all the others want to go."

"That settles it, then," said the post commander, decisively. "Get all of 'C' Company but the guard down at the ferry, captain. We'll cross over and move out a mile or so in support, and let Warner reach forward and see what he can find. They'll never dream how small our force is, and we'll be back before it's daylight."

But the dawn comes very early in the long June days and these high latitudes. It would be broad daylight by four o'clock, and now it was long after twelve. Silently, without sound of bugle or tap of drum, Captain Bosworth marched his remaining thirty soldiers down the sloping roadway to the ferry, where old Driscoll was still up and alert. Lights were peeping from many

of the officers' quarters and burning brightly at the guard-house and adjutant's office as the little column trudged away, the major, his adjutant, and Sergeant Decker, mounted, following a moment later. At the post there remained now only the quartermaster and the officer of the day with the few soldiers of the guard, the surgeon and steward, the two or three sick and wounded, and, as their sacred charges, probably thirty families of the officers and sergeants. No wonder that among these latter there was weeping and anxiety, for the near presence of Indians and the incidents of the earlier night had unstrung everybody.

Gazing from her window on the dim outlines of the little command as it marched away across the parade, Mrs. Ross thanked God that her husband was safe among his trusty men, even though far away in the heart of the Indian land, and that her baby boy, the hero of the evening gone by, was sleeping soundly, peacefully, wearily, at last. Other ladies, too worried and excited to sleep, gathered for the time being at the quarters of the commanding officer, near the edge of the bluff, and listened to the rush of the river over its stony bed, the creaking of the blocks as the heavily-laden scow was slowly pulled to the northern bank, and then in awe-struck silence hung about the north gallery, listening with painful anxiety for any sound or signals from the front. Here

they were joined by the doctor, while the quartermaster and Lieutenant Morton, officer of the day, remained out on the grassy part of the bluff, close to the foot of the tall flag-staff, and the silence of desolation seemed to fall on old Fort Frayne. And so another long, long hour passed away and not a sign or sound came from the front. Down at the ferry landing Driscoll's dim light was burning, and over at the opposite shore, under the bank, another faint glimmer told where two or three men had been left to guard the ferry. In pushing forth by night into the enemy's country Crandall meant to keep secure his line of retreat. It would have been quite possible for Indians to slip in behind them, provided they could overcome their superstitious fears, and with their keen knives, under cover of the darkness, hack away at the great cable of the ferry until the last strand was severed, and thereby cut off all possibility of reinforcements reaching them from the fort, or indeed of the return of those soldiers already at the front. The lantern lay under the bank, but the guardians, flat on their stomachs, were close to its top, where all approaching objects were thrown into relief against the starry northern sky. One o'clock, and half-past one, in muffled tones the sentries at the post had cried, and some one of the guard across the stream, as though to reassure the watchers at the fort, echoed back the

glad "All's well." Surely, though, it was time to hear from Warner and the venturesome little party that had been pushed forth into the night to scout the jagged slopes of Eagle Butte. Surely it was time, high time, for news of him.

And this was what poor Billy O'Toole, corporal of Captain Ross's troop, was thinking, as he lay there in hospital bemoaning the fate that laid him up with a broken leg no sooner than he had recovered of his bullet-broken arm. The despatches that had reached Major Crandall to be forwarded to General Crook in the field near Tongue River were, he felt assured, of grave importance, and he had done his best to make the run with them, only to be beaten back at the very start and saved from death, perhaps, only by the accidental presence of his captain's little boy, and now, to think of it! when the garrison was out against the very Indians who had driven him in, and when there were indications that every man with a soldier's heart in his breast was needed on the fighting line, here was he, Corporal O'Toole, the Irish boy who had sworn he'd win his sergeant's stripes this very summer, laid by the heels like a bedridden old woman, of no use to himself or anybody else. "Bad luck to it all," moaned Billy. "Why didn't I remember what the captain said, and never go the east side of the mountains if I wanted to keep out of the way of the Sioux?"

And with that a sudden idea occurred to him. He couldn't sleep, knowing all the movement and excitement around him this night. The hospital attendant couldn't stay there by him with all his own eager desire to hear what was going on outside, and so, at one o'clock, after a brief visit from the surgeon, here were these two lively troopers, Downey with his shoulder in bandages, O'Toole with his leg in splints, comparing notes and cursing their luck as soldiers will, and sadly disturbing, I fear, the two or three patients in hospital with mountain fever or kindred ailments. Soldiers don't get the fight taken out of them by fractures or gun-shot wounds. Wasting disease it is that makes them childlike and meek, and now when the other poor fellows were apathetic and only wanted to sleep, these two feverish cripples were keeping themselves and everybody else awake. The doctor had ponderously felt their pulses and bidden them go to sleep when he came in to see how they were getting on, but had told them nothing of the situation at the front, holding, no doubt, that it was no longer any of their business. Downey, to whom opiates had been administered to relieve his pain, had been drowsing, but was now awake and under a fire of cross-questions. The attendant had let O'Toole know that everybody, almost, had gone across the river to back up the effort of Lieutenant Warner to find

out what those signals meant at Eagle Butte, then he himself had vanished, and it was while he was gone that Billy's idea came. Downey had stoutly asserted that up to the time he left the general's camp on Tongue River no scouting-parties or detachments had been sent out to the south or east, therefore none from camp could now be there at Eagle Butte. "Of course," said he, "some fellows might have started behind me with later news and nearly caught me, and they've been headed off perhaps at Trooper Creek. They might have fled westward and got up among the boulders and niches of the Butte, but I don't believe it."

"But was no one out scouting west from camp, over towards the Big Horn River or north towards the Yellowstone?" queried Billy, merciless of Downey's pain; and then at last as late as one o'clock did the courier remember that not one but several parties had gone out, among them a lieutenant and a number of men from their own regiment, and these fellows he remembered having heard were sent out westward, and had not been heard from up to the time of his leaving camp three days before. This was indeed news, and news of such importance that O'Toole, reckless of the peace of the two fever patients, lifted up his voice in a shout for a hospital attendant, who by that time had sneaked far over to the guard-

house to learn what he could from the sergeant there on duty, and in their chat and the excited talks of the half-dozen soldiers in the guard-room, Billy's shouts went up unheard by their objects, but were loudly audible across the parade. Mrs. Ross, kneeling by Roddie's bedside, started at the sound, and so did her sleeping boy. Even in his almost dreamless slumber the little fellow seemed to hear and answer the summons of his friend.

Calling her sturdy ally, Cook, to come from her room where she had been consoling Katty much of the night, and telling her to watch over Roddie, Mrs. Ross slipped a shawl over her shoulders and hastened out across the dark parade. Up by the flag-staff she could see the dim light of the corporal's lantern, and in the glare of the parlor windows distinguish mantled forms on the major's porch. Even as she hurried along the gravel path that led to the hospital, she heard O'Toole's voice again, angrily and appealingly uplifted. "Schlenger,—Schlenger, ye thafe! Where are ye?" It was a wonder the sound did not reach the watchers at the north end of the post, so powerful was his shout. But Mrs. Ross stopped for no one else. It was Roddie's friend O'Toole who was calling for aid, and that was enough. Breathless, excited, but full of kind intent, she reached the old wooden building and eagerly made her

way to the dimly-lighted ward. There was O'Toole braced up in bed, squirming like a madman in his effort to reach the curtain and direct his next shout through the open window.

"What is it, O'Toole?" she asked. "What can I do?" And then a flash of joy lit the Irishman's face.

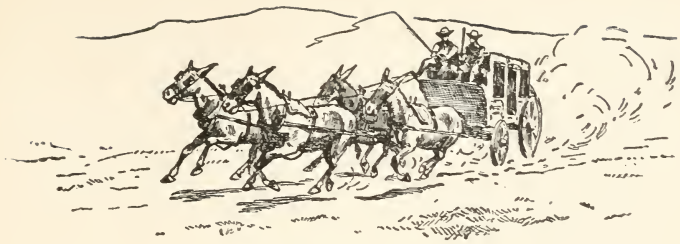
"For the love of God, ma'am, get word to the major it's some of our own troop—the captain's troop—that's corralled out at the Butte. Sure he told me, he told them, if ever they was cut off when riding courier, or out hunting, to kape to the west of the mountains, and that's what these fellows have done until they sighted the Butte. I know it,—I'll bet on it, ma'am!" And then came the attendant hastening in just as she would have turned to go, and the excited voices of the guard could be heard as they ran by, some of them, in answer to sudden summons from the bluff.

"They're signalling again!" cried Schlenger, as he hastily entered, then stopped abashed at seeing the captain's wife.

"Go on!" she cried. "Tell us what you know."

"There's a new blaze at Eagle Butte, ma'am, and Lanigan's sounding sick-call again. The ambulance is wanted at once."

And then for the second time that beautiful June night there was wild excitement at Fort Frayne.



CHAPTER V.

One thing that had disturbed Mrs. Ross not a little was the fact that among the very few letters brought in by the courier Downey there was none for her. Captain Ross never lost an opportunity of sending her letters or messages when separated from his wife by the inevitable duties of Indian campaigning. Not one summer of their married lives had this devoted couple been able to pass in peace and each other's company. All through the war of the Rebellion Ross had been with his regiment of volunteer cavalry in Virginia. After the war, gazetted to a mounted regiment in the regulars, he had been sent to the Western frontier, and there life had been one long succession of Indian raids, chases, and campaigns that in Arizona or Texas lasted all the year round, but here in Wyoming were fortunately limited, except on rare occasions, to the months from April to November. Hitherto every courier or scout coming in had

brought at least some little missive with a few words of love for her and her boy, while the regular mail-carrier, sent in with a strong guard once in ten days, brought a big budget. Now the last long letter had come five days before Downey, and it told that the general had spoken of sending out two or three detachments to scout the northern foot-hills of the Big Horn and the beautiful valleys between them and the Yellowstone. His scouts sent forth to penetrate the Indian country and carry despatches to the commands of Generals Terry and Gibbon along the Yellowstone had either been driven back or were heard of no more until long months had elapsed, and no one knew just where the great Indian villages lay. On every side their active war-parties harassed the outposts and pickets, sometimes even creeping close enough to fire into the camps, but all effort to locate the main body had been vain. One reconnoissance in force had demonstrated the fact that there were far too many warriors for the Gray Fox, as the Sioux called General Crook, to tackle with the troops he had, and while waiting for more to reach him, he was striving to find out what he could with regard to the numbers and position of the Indians.

Captain Ross was a man after Crook's own heart, a soldier who loved his duty and did it "up to the handle," and the moment Mrs. Ross read in

the letter that somebody was to be sent out to scout for the villages, she felt sure it would be her husband and his gallant troop. The surgeon had assured her that Downey had said he left under sudden orders and in a great hurry, that Frank Grouard, Crook's favorite scout, had just come in with some important information, and the general wrote despatches at once to General Sheridan, and these, carefully packed in oil-skin, he had been told to dash through with to Frayne, and from there Major Crandall would forward them to Laramie. Downey only brought a small pouch of letters hurriedly scribbled by the few officers who happened to be around head-quarters just before his start. He hadn't seen Captain Ross for a day or so and hadn't heard of his being out scouting, but he might be for all Downey knew. And now when she heard this summons for the ambulance and soon heard Lanigan's bugle far away across the Platte winding the familiar tones of sick-call, poor Mrs. Ross would again have besieged Downey with questions, but the doctor came hurrying in, and saw how flushed and feverish his patient was already looking, had him screened off forthwith, ordered O'Toole to silence, and sternly rebuked him for making such a row in the hospital at night, and then, offering Mrs. Ross his arm, politely but positively invited her to leave.

"Let me take you back home," he said. "You can do nothing but harm over here. I had to order that crazy pate Katty of yours out of the ward two hours ago, and now here you are doing almost as much mischief as she might. And Mrs. Ross, though sorely anxious, could not but see that the doctor was right. But instead of going home she begged to be allowed to join Mrs. Crandall and other ladies at the major's, where, as it would soon be daybreak, they could perhaps see what was coming from across the Platte.

And so for a second time this eventful night did even so devoted and watchful a mother quit guard over Master Roderick Ross, who, flushed with the triumph of early evening, was sleeping, to be sure, but with no one but sleepy Cook to watch over him. Meantime, poor Katty, learning in some way that O'Toole had been shouting for help, was again up, and, dishevelled and carelessly dressed, had run out ostensibly "to find the missus," but really to be near her lover, and there at the hospital the doctor found her, as he was hastily preparing his field-case of instruments, bandages, etc., while some of the men were hitching the only remaining mules to the ambulance, and then the doctor said all manner of rebuke as he hustled the protesting maiden out into the still and starry night, and bade her go back to bed and not come around there again making a bedlam of

the hospital and a fool of herself. Dr. Short was sometimes as brusque as his own name, and poor Katty went home weeping and wailing to pour out her sorrows to Cook, who in turn upbraided her for making such a noise, and between them they woke up Buster.

Now, Buster had been dreaming over the events of the evening, not as they occurred, but rather as he had painted them, and he was in most heroic mood when, the first scare over and Katty with her tears had been banished from the room, Cook told him how his mother had gone to the major's, where most of the ladies were, because there had been a fight out by Eagle Butte and somebody was wounded and they had sent for the ambulance, and then nothing would do but the boy must scramble out of bed and sit by the window where he could hear for himself what was going on. It was useless for Cook to remonstrate and worse for her to use compulsion. Buster would have raised an outcry that would appall the garrison. Believing that his mother would soon return, Cook surrendered and rocked resignedly in her big chair by the now deserted bed, while Roderick, rifle in hand, and clad only in his bifurcated night-robe, took station at the window.

Away went the ambulance rattling down the hill just about quarter to three o'clock, while an anxious group, augmented every moment by new

arrivals from other officers' quarters, gathered in the major's parlor and piazza. It was growing chilly, and the ladies wrapped themselves closer in their shawls, or their husband's military capes, as they huddled together on the gallery overlooking the valley, wistfully, tearfully in many cases, peering out into the darkness beyond and speaking occasionally in low, awe-struck tones. They heard the rattle of hoof and wheel as the ambulance was drawn aboard the scow, the creak of blocks as the old craft once more went swinging out across the stream, the voices of men indistinctly audible above the murmur and wash of the waters, and then saw the good-by wave of the lantern, as the vehicle was rushed up the opposite shore and clattered away to the front.

And then for half an hour more they watched and waited, and then, just as a pallid light began to creep up into the eastward sky, and the sentries had done crying, "Three o'clock," the officer of the day came springing in from the bluff and asked for the major's field-glasses. "Somebody's coming slowly in 'way out there to the north," said he, "and we can hear distant firing."

Mrs. Ross could never afterwards explain what strange fear it was that took her homeward a moment later, but it was something about Roddie, and something apparently well grounded, for when she ran panting up the stairway and into the

pretty, dimly-lighted room where she had left her baby-boy placidly sleeping less than an hour before, lo! there was Cook snoring beside the empty bed, and for the second time that night her birdling had flown.

Gone was the little rifle; gone were the little boots and stockings and the blue flannel shirt he loved to wear because it was like that which daddy dressed in on campaign; gone were his cap and cartridge-belt; gone, alack! was Buster. The sounds of skirmishing perhaps had reached him from afar. At all events something had fired his soul with longing for another show at the front, and the son and heir, the hope and pride, but, alas! not the comfort, of the household of Ross was up and away, and there was no man to follow him.

This time Mrs. Ross did not faint. She flew at Cook and then at Katty, and then down-stairs, and then to the quartermaster's corral, where a recruit sentry was scared out of his seven senses at her frenzied coming, and only escaped shooting her in his frantic dread that the Indians were upon him through the fact that his rifle refused to go off at half-cock.

Into the gate she rushed in hopes of overhauling her fledgling ere he could mount and gallop, but this time came on a wrong scent. Here in his stall dozed Beppo, heedless of the gathering excitement at the post, and then it dawned upon her

that her little man might not care to swim the Platte a second time that night, and, whatever his plan might be, it involved no more of Beppo, unless indeed she had followed so quickly that he had had no time to saddle and get away.

Bidding the sentry guard that door-way until the corporal came, and, on peril of his life, not to let her little boy in if he were out or out if he were in, back she scurried—a long weary climb uphill again to the major's quarters—to gasp and cry and tell, what they already knew, that again had Master Roderick broken bounds. They could hardly give ear to her now. The officer of the day had sent the corporal down to head him off if he appeared at the ferry. There was really nothing more to be done, only listen,—listen and look. "They are fighting dreadfully out there," sobbed one poor wife and mother, gazing with staring eyes across the now vaguely lighted valley, out towards where the crests of distant heights were taking on faint hues of purple and pink. There in the intervening lowlands, like fireflies, every now and then came spiteful little flashes, every now and then the sharp though distant ping-g of the death-dealing rifle, and now all Fort Frayne was crowding to the bluff and waiting for the sound of battle, and old Driscoll, with his ferry-boat and his two guards, was grappling sturdily the north bank and getting everything in

readiness to carry over the troops as soon as they should come in, and not a word could be got out of him or anybody else across the stream as to what had become of Buster.

But over on the northward prairie were men who could answer the question, though it was too much for any one at the fort. Out over that hard, elastic turf, bearing straight away from the Reno road and heading for the dimly outlined butte, the ambulance had been driven at a lunging gallop, following Lanigan's lead. A mile away, and within view of the occasional flashes that told where the fighting line was at work, there came a faint hail from a clump of dark objects off to the left that fortunately caught the bugler's ear, despite the rattling of the rickety trap behind him.

"Who are you fellers?" shouted he in the "lingo" of the frontier, and the answer promptly came.

"Drive over here with your amb'lance. The lieutenant can't hold out no longer."

And even as Lanigan called to the excited driver to follow close in his tracks, the figure of a horseman loomed into view, coming from the direction of the firing, and a voice they all knew and obeyed instinctively called a halt.

"Wait just where you are, Lanigan. I've two more right here. We've seen the last of the

Indians this trip." Then, as the vehicle came to a stand-still, the young adjutant rode a bit to one side, calling, "Where are you, Fred, old boy? Let's get you off that horse now and into the ambulance," and there came reply from the darkness.

"I'm 'fraid the lieutenant's fainted, sir, 'n' I can't——" and the last words were lost in inarticulate sound. It was evident the speaker was staggering under some heavy load. The adjutant sprang from his saddle and ran to his assistance. Lanigan, tumbling off his horse, tossed the reins of the two over the front wheel and followed his officer, and dim figures came into view supporting some sorely wounded comrades from the direction of the front, where the firing had died away entirely, and presently the major's voice was heard conveying to invisible skirmishers instructions to "fall back there on the left and swing in towards the river," and then, in charge of the little party of bearers and burdens, came Sergeant Curran, just as a diminutive, boyish form backed out from the dark depths of the ambulance and lowered itself to the steps at the rear and thence to the ground, and then, Ballard in hand, stood bolt upright by the rear wheel just in time to receive the incoming party, and lo! there was Buster.

Sergeant Curran didn't know whether to swear with wrath or shout with ecstasy. He caught the

little rascal in his arms and lifted him to his shoulder. "You young imp!" he cried, "how on earth did you get here this time?"

"Comed in the ambulance," said Buster, stoutly. "Caught it on the jump as it went down-hill and climbed in behind. I knew old Driscoll wouldn't let me cross if he saw me, so I hid under the seat. Is the fight all over?"

"Hark to him now, lieutenant! Sir, I beg pardon, but will you listen to this? Here's Masther Roderick wants to know is the fight over. Oh, Lord, what wouldn't his father say!"

But the lieutenant who came running up was in no mood for praise. It was Warner this time. "You here, you precious young scalawag? 'Pon my soul, but you deserve a larruping! Do you never think of the misery you are causing your mother? How'd he get here? What do you mean by bringing him over at this time of night, —at such a time, anyhow?" he asked, indignantly, of the driver.

"I never dreamed the boy was there, sir," protested the poor fellow thus wrathfully accused. "He must have jumped in as I was driving down the hill."

"I did," said Buster, proudly. "I wasn't going to stay over there with all those crying women when—when there was fighting goin' on over here. How'd I know that it mightn't have

been papa and his men that were corralled over there at the butte?"

And Warner could storm no longer. Partly in sheer delight at the little scamp's supreme importance, partly in admiration of his daring, partly because at this moment the adjutant with Lanigan came bearing between them an almost helpless man, Warner ceased and, with a cry of distress, sprang to aid them.

"Fred! Why, good God, dear boy! I didn't dream it was so bad as this."

And then indeed did Buster's nerve give way, and in sheer distress and shock the little fellow burst into tears, for Fred was none other than the second lieutenant of his own father's troop, who, with a sergeant and six men, had been cut off from their party while scouting in the Big Horn, and, slipping out by night, had made the best of their way around the western base of the mountains and almost back to old Fort Frayne before being again headed. Then, retreating to the rocks of Eagle Butte, they had stood the Indians off and signalled for aid, which, thanks to the persistence of Sergeant Decker, had at last reached them, but not until two of the little party and one of Warner's men had been seriously wounded.

"This has been the wildest night I ever knew at any post I ever served at," said the gray-haired major, as at last the sun came peeping up over the

horizon and all Fort Frayne seemed gathered at the bluff to welcome the warriors home; "and, Sergeant Decker, your name goes forward with my recommendation for a commission before I'm an hour older, and as for Buster, I'm going to swear him in as high private in 'C' Troop this very day, —after his mother gets done whipping him."

But there was no whipping in store for Roddie, much as he might deserve it. Perhaps had fewer people recommended and urged it, Mrs. Ross would have administered the unaccustomed punishment, but, somehow, the more people tell parents what they ought to do with their children the less are parents apt to do it. Roddie was doubtless kissed and cried over a great deal and scolded not a little, and Billy O'Toole in hospital said, "Hurrah for Buster!" and Lieutenant Fred Winter said, "Hurrah for Buster!" and "C" Troop to a man, when they heard of the adventure, said, "Hurrah for Buster!" and the story went the rounds of the bivouacs on the Deje Agie, and everybody said the boy was cut out for a soldier and would never be fit for anything else, which was how the little fellow was given his start on the road to a commission and became known, throughout the old regiment, at least, as "Trooper Ross."

CHAPTER VI.

And now we come to what might be called the second stage of Buster's climb. He had made a record, as the troopers laughingly said, and came very near being spoiled as a result. Captain Ross being away much of the time, as his duties demanded in those days of almost incessant campaigning, the boy was left to the control of his mother, and his mother, as we have seen, was somewhat variable and certainly over-indulgent. For a few months after the episode of Eagle Butte our Roddie put on more airs over the other boys at Frayne than they could consistently stand. Big or little, they were more or less jealous of his fame, and when the story appeared in print, as appear it did (a wandering correspondent of a New York daily being stranded there in the wake of the field column, and only too glad to get anything to write about), Buster's unpopularity among his kind was something appalling. It must be

owned that he wasn't the happiest boy in the world the rest of that long summer, but presently there came news—dreadful news that turned the little garrison into a grief-stricken community, and though he wouldn't have owned it for the world, dashed all Buster's tremendous schemes of escaping from Frayne and joining his father's troop in the field. The very day after the Glorious Fourth brought the tidings that General Custer and his gallant troopers of the Seventh Cavalry had been massacred to a man, and the hearts of the women and children at the fort were filled with terror and dread; nor were there lacking men whose faces blanched at the thought of encountering such a fate, and fellows who eagerly sought to ride as couriers before couldn't be hired to try it now.

Indeed, so fearful was the government that, encouraged by their wild success, the Indians might concentrate all their force first on one, then on the others of the three separate commands of troops then in the field, that strong reinforcements were ordered out, and the valley of the Platte was soon alive with dusty blue columns and the white tops of army wagons creeping steadily up-stream. And then a long, long campaign followed, and early in August, General Crook's command, with which Captain Ross was serving, marched from the camp on Tongue River and was swallowed up

in the Indian country beyond. The next heard of them they were away up at the Yellowstone, then away down the Yellowstone with Terry's men, and then they cut loose again, and for weeks were heard of no more. Fancy the anxiety and distress of the wives and mothers waiting—waiting and praying at those frontier forts. Not until late in September were Crook's soldiers reported again, and then it was far over at the east, in the Black Hills of Dakota, which they had reached, said the papers, "in rags and starvation," having had to eat their horses to keep alive; and this in great measure proved to be true. The Indians had everywhere burned off the grass. The soldiers had neither tents nor wagons,—nothing but pack-mules for rations and ammunition, and these rations were speedily used up, and the command left to forage upon a barren country. Buster nearly cried his eyes out when he heard that several of his pet horses in his father's troop had dropped exhausted by the way-side and were killed to prevent their falling into the Indians' hands, and that later three more were shot for food,—such food! tough, stringy, and revolting, yet better than what was left of cavalry boots.

Captain Ross came home in November, looking like the ghost of himself, so thin and scrawny had he grown, and Mrs. Ross cried over him as she had over Buster, but the boy danced about

"Daddy" in exuberant delight. Now the rides would begin again, and he'd show papa how to ford the Platte in lots of places and take him out to "Buster's Battle-Field," as the officers fairly maddened the other boys by naming the scene of "the affair of June 20th," as it was termed in military despatches. Grand times had the boy and his fond and devoted father for several weeks after the hard campaign was ended, and many a time did they ride over the scene, and many and many a time did Buster, with flashing eyes and flushing cheeks, go over the thrilling story. And that winter when the Fourth Cavalry came back, after their sharp fight with the Cheyennes, a famous colonel patted Buster on the head with what was left of his hand,—several fingers of it having been shot away during the war,—and told him that he hadn't any boys of his own, but if he had he'd rejoice if they could ride and shoot and fight Indians like him, which still further puffed Master Roderick; and that miserable, mean, big bully, Jim Parkinson, Captain P.'s boy, three years older and bigger than Roddie, tormented and teased and jeered and nagged him into a fight, and sent the Indian killer howling home with a bloody nose. I'm glad to say Jim Parkinson's papa soundly hided him for his sins that very day, for Roddie had been wantonly set upon, and he made a gallant and furious defence against heavy odds.

But Captain Ross had long since begun to see that the garrison was no place in which to bring up and educate his son, and had been planning to send him to an Eastern school just so soon as he was old enough to leave his mother; and this winter, finding lessons utterly neglected for the months of his absence, the father spoke, and precipitated a tearful time. Mrs. Ross declared her precious child should never go without her, and Master Rod declared he'd never go where he couldn't shoot and ride and be near the old troop. "Why," said he, "it would just break Beppo's heart, and Billy O'Toole's, too." Very possibly the captain might have carried his point had he only been able to go East with them for a few months and see the little fellow safely lodged as a boarder in the Rockford Academy, but officers could not be spared that winter, and the whole command was in the field all the following summer; and though Captain Ross left strict injunctions what Rod should study and how much he must learn, the lessons soon flagged with the father away, and another Christmas came around with the boy still struggling with seven times eight and getting it wrong, and never being able to tell whether Albany was the capital of New York or New England.

Another year and they were transferred from Frayne far up into the wilds of the Wind River

valley and stationed at a lovely spot close under the beautiful peaks to the south, and there was splendid shooting in the mountains,—deer, bear, lynxes, and catamounts, and wondrous trout-fishing in the ice-cold streams, clear as crystal, that came tumbling and foaming down out of the rocks, and there was a big Indian reservation close at hand,—Shoshones,—and Rod spent more days, weeks, and months in saddle and little in study, and there was no school at Washakie, no one to teach him but his father, when father was home, and his doting, but easily influenced mother when father was away.

Strong, hearty, brimful of fun and mischief and pluck and spirits, not so big a braggart, but still having quite a little to say for himself, Roderick Ross burst into his teens as sturdy a looking boy as one could ask to see, with lots of good in him, but precious little geography and grammar. And here at Waskakie they spent a placid and uneventful and, so far as Rod was concerned, unprofitable two years. The captain had to be scouting weeks at a time, and lessons had to be conducted by mamma, and Rod could coax and wheedle her out of all sense of duty in the matter. It was not until that boy was fourteen years old that at last the father set his foot down and took him East to school.

This was in '81, when there was no campaigning

to speak of for the old regiment; but Rod grieved sorely at the idea of giving up Beppo for good and all, though he had long since given him up as a mount and taken to a Shoshone pony. His whole boy life, ever since he could remember, had been spent with the army in the West. He had never seen a locomotive or a train of cars since he was too young to take much note of them. His clothes were made for him by the tailor of his father's troop, and his sturdy boots and shoes came by mail from Chicago, and didn't fit him or please him half as well as did the Shoshone moccasins. He hated what he disdainfully termed the "boiled shirt," and always wore soldier blue flannel except when dressed for some special occasion in garrison, or when fishing, shooting, and exploring in the mountains, when he preferred his hunting-shirt of Indian tanned buckskin, made for him by the squaws in old Chief Washakie's lodge.

He had had few playmates in the Wind River valley. The officers were very few in number. Their boys, with one or two exceptions, were East at school, and Buster was now in his turn the biggest boy at the fort. He was too big, in fact, to play with young Sammy Baker and the doctor's eldest hope, and indeed it must be owned their respective mammas did not wish him to play with them, for Rod was fond of vigorous out-door life and was as rough as a bear cub in his gambols, and it is a fact

that the last summer he spent at Washakie, while his father was escorting the lieutenant-general on the upper Yellowstone, Master Ross preferred to associate with two well-grown scapegraces of Shoshones, bare-armed, bare-bodied, bare-legged, who could teach him no end of things worth knowing in the line of trapping, hunting, and fishing, and Rod was little better than a savage himself, but for the gentler influence of his loving mother, when Captain Ross came riding homeward late in the fall, and, within the week of his arrival, applied for six months' leave, and broke up housekeeping forthwith.

Now, strange as it may seem, Mrs. Ross loved that army life far from the comforts of civilization. She liked her army friends and associations, and she had long since lost touch with her own. She had sisters two, and they were both married and busy with their own boys and girls and joys and sorrows, and they had not prospered too well in the world, neither had her husband's people, and, as is not unusual, they often asked for help from the army officer, who, though thrifty and economical, was in no wise the wealthy man they said, and anything but able to support other families than his own, but he had saved a fund for Rod's education, and now meant that the boy should have it.

Quitting old Washakie one perfect October

morning, they bowled away over the hard, winding road,—all the garrison out to see them off, with Sergeant O'Toole riding alongside all the way to Lander, and Rod's Indian friends grinning good-by at the agency, and that night they slept at Miner's Delight, far up among the bold, beautiful heights that separate the Sweetwater valley from the Big Horn, and with another day they were crossing the backbone of the continent and diving down to the Big Sandy, and with the third they were far to the south, across the broad arid desert plateau, and there, at Green River City, Rod's wondering eyes were fascinated by the great, puffing, grinding, roaring engine and the long train of heavy express and Pullman cars that, just at sundown, came rolling in from the dusky west. That night, for the first time he could remember, he slept in a Pullman car, and for hours could hardly sleep at all.

True to his old plan, Captain Ross strove to explain everything to his boy, to teach him the use and meaning of everything he saw, and in lessons of that kind the youngster proved a ready pupil. He looked with wonderment at the curving lines of snow-sheds as they crossed the great ridge of the Rockies at Sherman. He looked in amaze at what seemed to him the colossal size of the buildings at Omaha, and clung to his father's side as they stood on the rear platform of the train when

it crossed the river, and was dizzy at the height and apparent insecurity of the great bridge and disgusted at the dirty look of the huge volume of water boiling and swirling and rolling away far underneath their feet.

But Chicago deafened and appalled him. Never had he heard anything like the roar of the streets. Never had he seen anything like the swarms of shouldering, bustling, hustling people. Never had he gazed at anything like the great buildings, many of them towering up towards the skies. It made his gentle mother's headache, and but for the excitement and joy of shopping with certain of her friends who came to meet her at the Leland, she would have preferred remaining in her room while the captain took his bouncing, big-eyed boy to get him out of his army-made clothes and into something civilized, and Rod's discomfort in a sack suit with waistcoat and choker and a stiff Derby hat was something almost pathetic. "I've got to do the same, Rod, my boy," said the captain, whimsically, "and I expect I'll look as odd as you feel. You'll soon get used to them, so make the best of it. You can't wear buckskin and moccasins at Rockford Academy. My only fear is they'll call you a Sioux as it is."

And the captain's fears were well founded. One week later, after a brief sojourn among relatives who had well-nigh forgotten that Captain

Ross had any children at all, Rod and his mother shut themselves up in her room for one long hour, and then for the first time the fond creature saw her boy borne away, and knew that there would be no good-night kiss for weeks to come. Leaving her with her kindred for a few hours only, the captain rode away with Rod, who, silent, plucky, but, oh, so mad to bury his head somewhere and sob his heart out! with trembling, twitching lips, with tear-brimming eyes, leaned back in the dark corner of the carriage, hiding from sight. The father's heart yearned over him. He longed to draw him to his side and fold him to his breast as many a time when a little fellow Rod had nestled there, but he well knew it would only bring on a flood of tears. They would be at the railway station in a few minutes, and that would never do, so, forcing down his great longing and love and pity, the captain talked busily away, just as though he never saw how Rod was grieving; and little by little the boy plucked up heart and tried to peer about him and be interested, and then, after a few hours' swift run by rail, they were landed at Rockford and whirled away over a hard, country road through the keen autumn, evening air, and just before sundown they spun along beside a smooth, green-carpeted playground whereon a swarm of boys, big and little, at whom Buster stared with all his soul in his eyes, were

in the midst of games of every kind, and another moment the father and son were in the presence of a gentleman in semi-clerical dress, a man with fine features, handsome dark eyes, and a sympathetic, earnest expression,—the head-master or principal of the Rockford School.

"And so this is our young Shoshone—this is our Sioux killer, is it?" said he, smilingly, kindly, yet half anxiously, as he looked the boy carefully over. "He is a sturdy fellow for his years, captain. Only fourteen, did you say? Why, he can down some of our First Latin already, I'll warrant. How is it, Rod? Are you pretty good at wrestling?"

"I've wrestled with some Indian boys—and a bear cub," said Buster, blushing, "but I don't think I know much about it." So already the father's admonitions were taking root. Brag was to be a thing of the past.

Presently a big bell began to ring, and the distant sound of shouting died suddenly away, and looking from the great latticed window, Buster saw the boys flocking in from the playground, speedily grouping under the direction of certain young men in authority into sections and classes, divided apparently by age and size. Many were pulling on coats or jackets as they came bounding from the field. Many carried bats and other paraphernalia of their games. Many were still eagerly

chatting, but now in subdued tones, and so, without being in any military formation, they came swarming up the broad roadway, the little fellows in the lead, and in a living and particularly human stream swept on under the window where, fascinated, the new-comer stood watching them, ignorant of the fact that his father and the doctor were there at his back, but by no means unconscious of the curious, often mischievous, glances directed at him by two-thirds of the youngsters of the school. And so they trooped by, sixscore of lively urchins of all ages from eighteen down to eight, and disappeared through the broad portals of a brick building to the left of the master's office; and then arose a prodigious clatter as bats and balls, tennis rackets, cricket stumps, and "shinny" sticks were stored away in an anteroom, and then there was a scurrying of springy feet up the heavily-matted stairway.

"They've gone to tidy up a bit," said the master. "Then we'll go in and see them at supper. First let me have you shown to your room, captain, for you'll stay with us to-night, I hope."

"I fear not, doctor. This little man's mother is about to spend the first night of her boy's life without having him near her, at least part of the time. I must be there to tell her how well he started."

They went up to the room together all the same, Rod and his father, and there were the boy's new trunk and his few belongings, and there the doctor presently joined them, bringing a gentle-faced, motherly-looking woman, who smiled kindly at the young Westerner, and was presented as "Our matron, Mrs. Lang, the best friend the boys have in the whole establishment." And after a little the big bell began to toll, and with a prodigious clatter of feet through resounding corridors the boys came tumbling out into the open air again and gathered about their class officers and were led away, so many little flocks, each with its own attendant shepherd, and the doctor, giving a hand to Rod, now blushing and awkward, and looking as though he would far rather have clung to his father's side, yet was too brave to say so, strode away down the carpeted hall, the big cavalry officer on the other side, and presently, opening an oaken door, led his charge into a great vaulted room where were set a dozen supper-tables, nearly a dozen boys at each, and instantly the Babel of tongues ceased, and the colored waiters, scurrying through with trays held on high, stood stock-still in their places, and sixscore heads, big and little, close cropped and curly, black and brown and flaxen and two or three lively red, were bowed in silence; and though some young eyes peeped curiously at the new boy, there was

decorum and reverence in manner, at least, as, in deep, earnest, manful tones, the doctor said a simple, heartfelt "grace." There was a murmured "Amen," and then Babel burst forth again on the instant, and the waiters shuffled with added speed, and as hungry, healthy, hearty a lot of youngsters as ever was seen "fell to" at their smoking suppers.

"Tell Betts to come to me," said the doctor, briefly, as he led the way to a table set upon a little dais farther up the room, still holding Roderick by the hand, and there they were presently joined by a bright boy of some thirteen years.

"Betts," said the doctor, "this is Ross,—Roderick Ross, of whom I told you yesterday. I have an idea you two can worry along together as peaceably as any. What say you, Ross, will you take supper here with us or with Betts and the boys?"

And with the eyes of the whole school upon him, Trooper Ross stepped from the doctor's platform and, making brave effort to keep a stiff upper lip, followed his new acquaintance down between the rows of clattering tables and took his seat for the first time in his life a school-boy at Rockford Hall.

CHAPTER VII.

Most boys find their first few days at school anything but pleasant. The masters, of course, begin by being gentle and considerate, as though making all allowance for the new-comers, but the boys themselves are moved with a spirit of mischief that nothing but the sturdiest self-denial can down, and even in so well-regulated an establishment as Rockford Hall there were occasions and opportunities of which the leading spirits did not fail to take advantage in Roddy's case. Betts, who had been selected as his companion and school mentor, was a boy who rejoiced for just about forty-eight hours in the importance of his position in the new-comer's eyes, and by that time Rod had heard and learned all that Betts could teach him about the rules, written and unwritten, of the school authorities, and was struggling with far greater show of interest to master the unwritten

code of ethics which governed the boys themselves. And right here his troubles began. Homesick, mother-sick as he was; weighed down by the overpowering sense of strangeness and constraint on every side, hampered here and hindered there by a system of rules for study and employment of time which his military bringing up prompted him to obey despite the fact that, through his love of open-air life, his whole nature rebelled against, Rod found himself like a cat in a strange garret, nervous, anxious, ever on the lookout for some sudden trick or ambush, and all the time his boy heart was yearning for the old free, joyous, buoyant days in which he had moved and had his being, a chief and a leader from the time he was ten.

Oh, the misery of that examination as to his qualifications! the shame of those unsolved problems in the Rule of Three and Proportion! the blunders in reading! the agony of standing dumb and crestfallen before his patient, helpful tutor, unable to answer questions in geography that were such old stories to even the smallest boys that they hugged themselves in ecstasy over the "Indian Killer's" ignorance! Sternly the master rapped his desk and called them to order, and told Phipps, junior (who guffawed aloud when Rod said Cheyenne was the biggest town west of the Missouri, and that Kansas City was the capital of Kansas), to write him out a page of Cæsar before

evening prayers, and sent Potter, who couldn't repress his snickering, to report to the head-master in his study, but it didn't comfort Rod. "I fear, sir," said the tutor to Dr. Runyon that afternoon, "that Ross will have to begin at the bottom. He knows less of books than any boy of ten we have in the school." Poor Rod could have sat him down and written a long, imploring letter to his father when, on the following day, he found himself reciting with four or five of the urchins of the school, who enjoyed his presence and predicament as much as it distressed him; but even here his lack of schooling and practice interposed. Beyond half a dozen little scrawls, ill-spelled and awkward and blotted, he had hardly written a letter in his life, and knew not how to begin one now. With a lump in his throat and hot tears of mortification starting to his eyes, he sat on the bench among those little fellows, and even the gentle manners of Mr. West brought him no comfort. "Don't let it trouble you, Ross," said the tutor, kindly, as he called him back at the end of the hour. "We'll get you into the groove in short order. Meantime, out there is your field, I fancy," and he pointed to the playground, now alive with rushing, shouting boys. "You'll be cock of the walk there before you're six months older, and, though I regret to say it, that amounts to far more in boyish eyes than being head of the school."

So, let us pass over the first few weeks of the sorrows and sadness so many of us—old boys and young—have known when first transplanted from the home corner to the desk at school, and push ahead to the vigorous winter days that soon came on, and base-ball, foot-ball, and cricket, the sports in which Rod had had no previous training, gave way to snow-balling and skating; to the days in which Betts and the small boys ceased to laugh at "Shoshonee's" blunders, because he was rapidly overhauling them in their elementary work and ambitiously reaching out for the higher branches; to the days in which the big boys, who at first had bullied and still strove to patronize him, were sure to take the Sioux Killer among the very first when choosing sides for a snow-fight, for he could throw a ball like a short-stop, and, when it came to a rush, was lengths ahead of the leaders. "A boy that had fought Indians with real bullets wasn't to be stopped by snow-balls," said they. No one knew but Rod himself the misery of his first ten days at Rockford Hall, because his two tear-stained missives to his mother were very brief and very brave. "It's going to be a hard fight for a fortnight, my boy," said the captain, as he strained him to his heart one minute before he left him, "but I want you to remember your soldier days and say nothing at all about it to your mother. If it's *too* hard, tell me and I'll

come. Otherwise I think it best for all of us that we keep apart until Christmas."

And so not until the holidays did he look again upon his mother's face or feel his father's clasping hand, and by that time Rod was himself again, had played with the crack team of "our school" against that of the Riverview Academy at ice polo (we used to call that "shinny," or, when very elegant, "hockey," in our days), and he was full of pride and enthusiasm in "our fellows" and of contempt for the Riverviews, and could brag by the hour of the pluck and prowess of Curran and Hammond and Big Bob Berryman of the "First Latin," who were preparing for college and were the bully players in every game and had taken him into fellowship despite the fact that he was two years their junior in age and immeasurably their inferior in schooling. They were in Virgil and Sallust and Xenophon and Geometry. Rod, alas! was still battling with the Rule of Three and Proportion, but making giant strides in other branches. "Somehow or other I hate figures," he said, and while his gentle, indulgent mother condoled and comforted and said all would come right, his father looked grave and disappointed. He had long had visions of West Point for his boy, and *there* no boy might hope to live without he could master mathematics.

But what secretly wounded the mother's gentle

heart and surprised the boy himself was that after the first few days of his visit to the home folks, still on their leave of absence East, Rod began to show impatience to get back to school. For the first time in his life the sturdy youngster had found himself among his fellows, boys of his own age. They had twitted him upon his clothes, derided his far Western ignorance of everything in their more civilized circle, and jeered his blunders, yet found themselves fascinated by what they learned from him of frontier life, the mountains, the streams, the great game, the scout, the trail, and the war-path, and even those who would have held him a butt for ridicule and laughter, because of his awkwardly worn "store clothes" and his utter ignorance of school ethics and traditions, secretly envied his experiences and the adulation which was speedily accorded him among the smaller boys. Studying and reciting with these latter, he had quickly become their leader and presently their champion, for, despite the vigilance of tutors, there were times when the older boys tyrannized over the juniors, not infrequently "taking advantage of a fellow's size" to cuff and maltreat such as had spunk enough to resist and "talk back." Only a day or two before the break-up for vacation "Shoshonee" Ross had interposed when Bill Forrester was kicking little Gibbs for some alleged piece of

boyish impudence, and a very stirring scene ensued right then and there,—a moment of mad and breathless excitement to the youngsters and of boiling wrath to Forrester and his cronies. "You'll pay for this, you Indian thief!" was Forrester's furious cry, as, picking himself up from under the table where he had been tripped and thrown in the first clinch, he shook his fist in Rod's face. "Just you wait till holidays are over, and you'll see!" And Rod, panting a little, but with eyes ablaze and fists firmly clinched, had said he reckoned he would, and he didn't care to postpone matters even that long. Why not settle it now?

There were reasons against that, however, with so many school officials close at hand and "no place handy." There had never been any square fighting at Rockford, though many a small boy had been mercilessly punched by many a bigger, and this revolt in behalf of "the kids" on part of the Sioux Killer came like a thunder-clap. There was neither time nor place to settle it then, as Forrester and his set asserted, but there was to be a lesson for Ross when the new term began, and they meant what they said.

Now, like all boys at all schools, they had at Rockford, as has been said, their unwritten code of school-boy ethics, and like most boys at most schools, their code was devised by the elder boys,

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and intended mainly for the guidance and government of the younger. Its cardinal principle seemed to be "Don't peach," or, as they more magniloquently expressed it when trying to be particularly impressive, "Never tell on a fellow-student; that's the meanest thing a boy can do."

No matter then what the old boy—the big boy—might do to the little fellow, it was cowardly and unmanly to complain. A big boy might steal a little fellow's apples, break his pet racket, ink his face or his clothes, cuff, kick, or abuse him, douse cold water over his bed in the dead hours of the night, tease, terrify, and torment,—all this and much more, said the big boys (some of them, at least), a big boy might do to the helpless little fellow who couldn't resent or retaliate, and there was nothing about it either cowardly or mean. But if a tutor happened in just in time to apprehend the result and not the offender,—to find some little fellow writhing in pain or crying in wrath and excitement and sense of wrong, or drenched and shivering from recent ducking, and if the tutor then demanded the name of the big boy at fault, then, then was the little victim a trump if he wouldn't tell, or a disgrace and discredit to his school and schoolmates if he did. It takes a fellow with even less than half an idea in his head to see that such a code as that was devised solely in the interest of the worst element among the

boys. Yet, so oddly are we constituted, boys and men both, that that is the class we are apt to protect and foster rather than be guilty of telling tales in or out of school. Now, nobody had tried any personal indignity at Rod's expense since his first week at Rockford, when Jack Hammond mashed his hat down over his eyes as they came out from prayers, and Rod, whirling with a military about face, sent his own hat spinning with a swing of his left hand and smashed Jack Hammond's with a blow of his right. Hammond was dazed by the force of it and didn't care to pursue matters further, but Hammond was a thoroughly good-hearted fellow, and mischief, not malice, had prompted his act. Rod's prowess in running, vaulting, and the way he took to base-ball and tennis speedily won his admiration.

"Take my advice and don't monkey with Shoshonee," he said to his fellows, and "monkey" they didn't. Within two months of his coming among them Rod was looked upon as an equal—indeed, as a valuable acquisition—by the leaders in all the sports and games, and his action, therefore, in flooring Forrester and boldly declaring in favor of small-boy rights was something the school had never expected for an instant. The boys, big and little, were too amazed to decide on the line of policy to be adopted. The matter was still unsettled as they scattered for the holidays.

"Just you wait till next term," as Forrester furiously cried, "then you'll see!"

And next term came in due time, and with it the Sioux Killer's first experience with the civilized savage.

"I've got it in for you, my buck," said Forrester, with a malignant scowl, the very evening of the reopening, as the boys were shouting their vacation experiences to one another, just after supper. "You'll wish you were back among your Indian friends before I get through with you," and the young fellow looked fully capable of carrying out a revengeful scheme of any kind. He was more than two years older than Rod, one of the oldest boys in school, and about his size and weight, but, as the youngsters gleefully declared, "Ross could lick him with one hand." Yet Forrester had quite a following among certain of the boys. His parents were wealthy and indulgent. He had pocket-money in abundance and in defiance of the rules of the school. He was a smuggler as well as a smoker of cigarettes and a bad example to the little fellows at their most impressionable age. Either in wrestling or sparring or an old-fashioned rough-and-tumble fight he would have been no match whatever for Roderick, not for lack of science or strength, for he had been gymnasium trained, which Rod had not, but because he had weakened his heart by the use of the narcotics so

frequently hidden in the cigarettes which he had been smoking ever since his twelfth year. But Forrester had no idea whatever of having a square tussle with Ross, despite all his loud talk about what he'd do if it wasn't for the tutor. He had formed a totally different plan.

A week went by without especial event. The boys were getting shaken down to their studies again, and Ross, to his speechless comfort, had been moved up a peg because of the marked improvement in his writing and simpler studies. The bitter weather of late January was upon them. The ice on the lake was superb, and the hardy boys were out every afternoon whacking the ball with their sticks and spinning and shouting over the glassy surface and coming in to supper all aglow with health and exercise. Rod never missed it, but Forrester and his set had been keeping in-doors. It was "too blamed cold" for them, said they, and therefore there was surprise on many faces when, on a biting January evening, just after sundown, and perhaps quarter of an hour before the big bell would boom for supper and the preliminary tidying up, Forrester and two of his clique came shuffling out on the ice. Mr. Weld, one of the tutors, who dearly loved the game, was in charge of the players that afternoon, and he too remembered later his surprise at seeing them appear. They were muffled up in

heavy overcoats, fur caps, and wore arctics on their feet, while the players had long since discarded everything of the kind and were in a glow notwithstanding.

"Keep away from that gang, Ross," muttered Jack Hammond, a moment after their appearance. "It'll soon be dark, and Weld's so near-sighted he can't see beyond the end of his nose. They've got some mean trick in the wind and I know it."

Rod laughed as he grabbed his stick the tighter and tossed back his curly head, while his clear, brave eyes flashed half-merry, half-contemptuous challenge, as he glanced at the trio huddling at the edge of the long rectangle. He felt so secure in his strength and glorious health, his quickness and agility. How could they harm him? What could they do? he asked. There was mighty little time, and then came the yell, "Look out for goal!" and, whizzing, spinning, skipping along, with a rush of players in its wake, the wooden ball came whirling down the glassy surface, and with three vigorous, lunging strokes of his skate-blades, Hammond shot under way to meet it, and Rod circled warily back, his eye on the ball, and, bending low, he cruised up and down, forward and back, in front of the goal-posts, ready and alert should the bounding sphere burst through the defence line and come zipping down to his guarded land.

Just a little behind him now, already dark and dim in the gathering dusk, were the goal-posts, and just a few yards beyond them, full ten feet wide, black and forbidding, the boiling, bubbling, swirling waters that came tumbling out from the sluice-gate of the mill-race. Those turbulent waters never froze. Even as he watched the exciting course of the game as it swerved to and fro across the pond, the shadowy forms of the players sometimes huddled in a surging mass, sometimes careering wildly over the ice, Rod could not but see that Forrester and his two cronies, as though carried away by their interest in the contest, had encroached on the space reserved for participants and were edging off towards the north goal, and just then the ball had broken away from the scrimmage and, no longer visible to Rod, had evidently taken a shoot in his direction, for Hammond, playing well back between the fighting line and the goal, whirled sharply to his right and went with a rush across the dark stretch, a clamoring crowd bearing down on him from the front, but too far away to "rattle him," for in another second Rod heard the resounding whack of his stick as it squarely struck the ball, heard his triumphant shout and Weld's loud "Bravo!" heard the keen scrape and shave of the skates as, like a flock of dusky brant, the rush of the players veered, wheeled, and spun around,

and within another second or two had strung out on a new course straight for the southward goal. Jack's magnificent stroke had sent the ball far beyond leaders, lungers, and "backs," and into the goal-keeper's hands. Now was Rod's time. He knew Willard well, the safest, surest home guard in the school, if he, Rod Ross, the Sioux killer and nearest rival, had to own it. Cool and imperturbable as Crab Jones, of blessed memory, Willard would mark its coming, and with a counter-stroke, firm as Hammond's, send it far, far back into the northland, and then would come Rod's opportunity. He could now afford to play forward twenty or thirty yards to meet it. Even if he could not fairly see, he could hear it whizzing on its way. And, just as the dim, spectral shapes at the other end of the rectangle seemed huddling all in a bunch again, and, all eagerness and excitement, he was just striking out to take ground farther to his front, something came settling down over his shoulders, something suddenly gripped and tightened about his legs, something suddenly jerked them from under him, and the next thing he knew, hurled violently forward on his face, he was slipping, sliding over the ice, half stunned by the force of his fall, yet clutching fiercely though vainly at every little projection on his way. Almost before he could realize it, he went whizzing beyond the goal-post, and then, merciful

heaven! not before he fully realized it, he found himself helplessly, swiftly gliding over the glassy ice, with those black, tumbling, seething waters just ahead, and the next thing he knew he had shot over the cracking edge, and, drowning his cry for help, the icy waves had closed over his head. A mocking, jeering laugh was the last thing he heard before his ears were closed, mingling with the boom of the big school-house bell summoning all hands to supper.

Two days later the faculty of Rockford Hall was assembled in conference, and knots of schoolboys, whispering excitedly, were clustered about the corridors. Up in the matron's cheery room, propped on his pillows and looking as though he had been pulled through a knot-hole, and yet not altogether unhappy, Rod Ross lay chatting in low tone with Hammond and Willard. The doctor with the head-master had left his bedside but a few minutes before, and each had striven to get the boy to answer certain questions, all to no effect.

"I never saw any one nearer to me than the east edge of the rectangle," was his sole reply to their appeal.

"He would not peach," whispered boys, big and little, in the thrill of their admiration. He would not accuse those who had all but murdered him.

"Shoshonee" had been rescued only in the nick of time, and only after long, long effort had he been revived.

Jack Hammond best could tell the story, and we'll let him do it. "I knew Willard would swipe that ball to Kingdom Come if he got half a chance," said he. "I had hoped to send it more to the left where Berryman could reach and drive it, but the moment I saw how it was going I hauled up and waited for it to come back. It came with a rush, even before I could turn to head it, and was away down half-way to the sluice-gate before I could fairly see it. I yelled for 'Shoney and lit out after it, and was utterly surprised at not seeing him near the goal. Two or three fellows were scurrying off towards school as I raced, and then I remembered what I had told Ross,—that those fellows were out to do him a dirty trick of some kind, and my first thought was that they'd tried it and that he'd sailed into them with his stick and was chasing them off the pond; so I went for the ball, found it clear up by the water-hole, and drove it back just for the fun of hitting it again, though the game was over and the bell a-banging, and then, close to the hole, as I sat down to take off my skates, I heard something whirling over the ice, and there, right beside me, like a big water-snake, something was squirming and twisting away towards the hole,

with the tail of it flapping behind. I swear it startled me a second, and then I saw it was just the end of a clothes-line, and I had sense enough to grab it, strength enough to hang on, and then yell for help. Something heavy, something *human*, was struggling at the other end, far under the ice, and something told me it was Shoshonee. You know the rest. It took four of us to pull him back and half a dozen to get him out, with the rope still slip-knotted around his shins."

But if Rod wouldn't peach and Forrester dare not confess, there was one miserable sinner who couldn't stand the pressure and who presently told all. They only meant to give Ross a cold ducking. They never thought how the current might carry him along under the ice, since with pinioned legs he couldn't swim. They were horror-stricken when a messenger came running up for help, saying Ross was drowned. They were full of misery and remorse and begged to be forgiven, but the faculty would have no more of them. Forrester and his pals went homeward that night,—expelled from Rockford Hall.

CHAPTER VIII.

We have to pass rapidly over Rod's school days, for they were mainly uneventful. Not until later did the real battle of his young manhood meet him. Life was not without its joys meantime, and, after a glorious summer vacation in the Wind River Mountains, with Jack Hammond for his guest and companion, after a month of hunting, fishing, and a trip in saddle past the Three Tetons and up to the wonderful Yellowstone Park, Rod Ross went back to Rockford the first of September, ready for another long year at the books. But that brief sojourn at an army post had "done the business" for Hammond. "I'm seventeen now," he wrote to his father, "and I've seen what I wish to be, and that is a cavalry officer. Tell Uncle Jared that the next vacancy that occurs in our district finds me begging for the place. I'll try a competitive examination with any fellow he chooses to name."

And Hammond had reason to feel confident. He was Rockford's prize scholar in mathematics and had not an equal at his home. "Uncle Jared" had been for six years representative of the district in Congress, and his reply was not encouraging. "I've about concluded," wrote he, "that nobody can get through West Point but the sons of army officers. They keep it up for their benefit, and lots of my associates here in the House think so, too. The examinations are too hard. I've appointed four bright boys one year after another, and they've sent 'em all back, and Mr. ——, of Indiana, has had seven turned out, and we're getting hot about it. Still, if Jack wishes to try his luck, let him come and be examined, and if he wins he can enter next June."

Rod's heart throbbed with mingled rejoicing, envy, and regret,—rejoicing for his friend's sake, envy that he strove to crush, because, all the Honorable Mr. Hammond's theories to the contrary notwithstanding, he knew that precious few army officers succeeded in getting appointments for their boys at all, and, even when they did, it was often developed that early education had been neglected and the youngsters fell before that great leveller of military ambition, the department of mathematics. With remorseless impartiality it performed its work, knowing no man's son from another's except by his proficiency or deficiency

in this vital science, and poor Rod, bending with new determination to his work, none the less felt his heart failing him as he realized, day after day, that examples and problems that were all so clearly, cleverly solved and explained by Jack were only darkness and drudgery to him. Jack went home to the competitive examination and came back an easy winner, the proud possessor, presently, of a document at which the other boys gazed in awe and admiration,—an order requiring him in the name of the President and Secretary of War to report on the 12th of June next to the Superintendent of the United States Military Academy at West Point. Already Rockford Hall in fancy beheld in Jack a plumed and sword-brandishing officer. Already Jack assumed what he conceived to be a martially erect carriage, and was only undeceived when Rod laughingly told him that it wasn't the abdomen but the chest that should protrude, that his back should be straight, not concave, that he should not lean backward with his weight on his heels, but forward, rather, on the balls of the feet; and that winter while Jack was patiently and affectionately doing his best to coach Rod in arithmetic and elementary algebra, Rod began giving Jack brisk half-hours of "setting up exercises" and lessons in the school of the soldier. Like all boys, Jack thought he ought to have a musket and begin with the manual

of arms, but Rod, better taught, succeeded in persuading him that exactly the opposite was the proper course,—that he must acquire the soldierly carriage and develop and harden the necessary muscles before trying to handle the eight pounds of wood and metal that go to make up the military rifle. Dr. Runyon took immense interest in the drill half-hours, and other boys begged to join the squad and started enthusiastically, but fell out, all but two or three, after the first few days. No boy need hope or expect to become a well-drilled, well "set up" soldier unless he has pluck and determination strong enough to triumph over many a muscular ache, pain, and weariness. And so Shoshonee, though nearly at the foot of his class in algebra, and only moderately well up in other branches, was becoming a centre of interest and influence in the boy community, as he was already among the foremost players in all out-door sports and recreations. His letters were more buoyant and hopeful now. "I still find algebra a mystery," he wrote to his father, "in spite of all that Jack does to help me, but I am well and strong and get along first-rate in other studies and in all our games. I'm in the cricket eleven and play substitute in the first nine at base-ball and will take Jack's place at second base when he goes, Berryman has promised me, and if we only had riding I think I could show them all a trick or two.

"But school will be mighty different when Jack goes. We're going, perhaps, to have two representatives at the Point in June. Ed. Mowbray's father represents this district (the 5th),—Jack's uncle has the 8th,—and he gave the appointment to him, although he didn't much care for it at first, but now Ed thinks he *does* just because Jack's going. I wish Ed's father might take a fancy to me, for, between you and me, I don't think Ed can pass. Jack gave him some of the sample problems and he said he worked out most of 'em, but Hilliard swears he got help, and I guess it's true. I might fail, too, father, and yet I'd work my eyes out if they could only pull me through. Confound Calculus and such things! What does a cavalry officer need of them? You don't know anything about them, and yet everybody says there's no better officer in the regiment, and to my thinking no better in the whole ten of them. Don't suppose I'm going to be miserable if I can't get to the Point. I'll come back to Washakie one of these days and start a ranch on the Little Wind River or up the Popo Agie and have a home all ready for you and mother when you retire. But all the same I do want to be a soldier, a trooper, more than words can tell."

And over this letter the father pondered long and earnestly.

But then came the spring-tide and the soft,

languorous mornings, and presently the long afternoons, with nearly two hours after school to give to practice on the diamond, and Rockford Hall was worked up to a pitch of excitement and enthusiasm over the challenge match to be played commencement week with the crack nine of Urbana College, where they had two hundred students to choose from, many of them well-grown young fellows of twenty and twenty-one, while Bob Berryman, captain of the Rockford nine, was barely eighteen and the oldest boy in the lot. It all grew out of a game played on the fair grounds in the fall, in which the college boys, sure of victory, and, as they said, "not wishing to beat the infants too badly," had put in some of their second-rate players, and, to their utter amaze, were beaten eleven to six. There was so much laughter and ridicule as a result that Urbana felt that nothing but an overwhelming defeat of the Rockford boys could atone for it, and the challenge was the result. School-boys who have searched their histories will remember how the night before Hastings the Normans busily polished their arms and devoutly prayed and prepared themselves for the coming battle, while the Saxon followers of Harold, in boisterous confidence, drank confusion to their enemies and spent their night in carousal. Somewhat in like manner the Rockford boys, day after day, spent their

recreation hours in assiduous practice, coached by a veteran of the League, once a star pitcher, while the collegians took things easily, serenely confident that all they had to do was put in their great first nine with Clem and Goddard "in the points," —Clem, of whom the big-eyed boys declared his curves had baffled Pop Anson himself when he was there looking for players; Clem, who struck out six men in the game with the famous Fort Waynes, and Goddard, who was said to have been offered *such* a big salary to catch for the White Stockings next season, only his family wouldn't let him. Before such a battery the Rockford 'Kids" would be shut out without a run. No wonder the excitement was high. Rockford had beaten every boy club of consequence in the State, but now they were tackling men. For weeks the home letters were full of that forthcoming match. Examinations, study, commencement exercises, speeches, honors, the dance for the graduating class, even the coming of sisters and sweethearts, paled in importance by comparison, and as this is the boys' story, let us follow their bent, for until that game was played and the thing settled nothing else was to be thought of.

Jack Hammond left the first of June to spend a week with a veteran officer near the Point who eked out his retired pay by coaching candidates for their examination. "Remember," he said, as

he wrung Rod's hand, "you're to wire me the score the moment it's settled, and remember what I say,—play well out when Leggett and Powell come to bat; they're the only left-handers they've got." For three weeks Shoshonee had been practised regularly at second. He was particularly strong at the bat and base running, was a daring slider, and absolutely sure and swift in throwing. "If only they won't bat grounders to him!" said Berryman, who was to captain at first base, "he'll play second without an error, but Sioux Killer's shy of grounders."

Rod felt the lump away up in his throat again as he bade good-by to his faithful friend and chum, and there was a mist before his eyes that afternoon that made grounders even more than usually fateful. There was shaking of heads in the nine when they gathered after practice, and Rod was unusually solemn, so was Berryman, but the die was cast. No better all-round player could be put on second. "Fumble" or not, it had to be Shoshonee. "Pray for flies, fellows," said Captain Bob, as they scattered for bed the night before the match, and no one echoed the suggestion with greater zeal than did our "Buster" of the days at Fort Frayne.

Perfect as a June day could be came the afternoon of the match. The collegians had arrived on a special train with half Urbana at their

back. They had dined with the Rockford team at the training-table, extended for the occasion, each boy having on his right the collegian who was to play the corresponding position, and Rod found himself blushingly doing the honors to a stalwart, sunburned, brown-moustached young athlete of twenty-two if he was a day,—the captain of the Urbana nine. The managers were there, too, and the change pitchers, the substitutes, and the umpire, a fat gentleman of forty-five in a suit of blue serge upon whom all Rockford Hall gazed in awe, for there was what was left of one of the most famous players of his day. Indeed, with the biggest and best dinner since Thanksgiving before them, the boys of Rockford could hardly eat at all for staring at and commenting upon their distinguished visitors. But they had to hurry through and get out and rest under the trees, while the tables were reset for the array of visitors,—fathers, mothers, uncles, aunts, sisters, and brothers, and the girls who came with them. And the Urbana contingent, even to those who brought lunch-baskets, were hospitably bidden to the feast, and at last when all were comforted, there was a general scattering over the beautiful park, and at four o'clock the biggest gathering ever seen on Rockford's playground. There had long been a small stand back of the catcher, but this had been added to, and, in great numbers,

benches, chairs, and camp-stools were extended out to right and left, well back from the foul line, and the green turf had been freshly mown and looked like velvet, and the base and coaching lines and the pitcher's box had all been newly traced in snowy whitewash. "Mighty pretty field," said the umpire. "Don't wonder your boys put up a good game of ball. Well, it's time they were here;" and, even as he spoke, to a burst of martial music, out from behind the big dormitory, welcomed by a cheer, the players came,—Rockford in their dainty dress of white, with blue trimmings, belts, and stockings, all freshly "laundered" for the occasion, Urbana striding along after them in a business-like costume of gray with U C in big blue letters on the breast. Proudly Urbana's drum-major led the way into the applauding field, and here the nines broke ranks for the fifteen minutes each of preliminary practice. Heavens, how keenly, breathlessly, the boys watched Urbana's famous fielders as the ball was batted skyward to the outer garden or sent skimming to the bases, there to be gathered up and fired like chain lightning to first! and how the Urbanas pretended not to watch their boyish antagonists, even while involuntarily applauding some quick, pretty pick up and throw that told how coaching and practice had profited the nine! At last came the summons, and the captains flipped

up the dollar, as was the fashion of the day, and big Berryman smiled grimly as it came up heads, and he sent Urbana to the bat and trotted nimbly out to his station, the blue legs of his team dancing away to the field.

And then everybody took a long breath, and all eyes were on Jake Lansing, Rockford's main hope and best pitcher, for Jake was a school-boy wonder whom the Urbana's found it difficult to hit when the autumn game was played, and who was reputed to have improved immensely under careful coaching during the spring. Score-cards with the batting order of both nines had been distributed through the swarm of spectators, and the Urbana contingent, all wearing in some fashion the emerald and old-gold colors of the college, broke into hand-clapping and shouts of "Perry! Perry!" as a lithe, sunburned, slender young fellow strode up from the bench, his bat over his shoulder. "That fellow can run bases like a streak," said Mr. Weld. "If he reaches first he's good for a run."

And now for one minute look at the field as the sprinter of Urbana College steps up to the home plate. Never mind the thronged, fan-fluttering grandstand or the long, long rows of parasol-shaded camp-stools and chairs and benches. Look only at the fair, sunshiny greensward, with its fresh, white lines, and the eight sprightly young fellows scattered at broad intervals over its trim

and elastic surface. Chunky Billy Cooper, Rockford's catcher, is playing far back under the stand, the fat umpire, flicking some dust from his trousers with a big silk handkerchief, has just shouted "Play ball," and is stooping now to observe the first shot, while Lansing is waiting for the new white ball to make the circuit of the bases and light in his hands. Buster has sent it like a white streak to Captain Bob at first and trotted back to his line. It is pretty to note how that infield has divided the ground, so that shortstop and Buster are almost equally distant from second base, and big Bob and his opposite at third well out from their goals. The ball that breaks through that picket line will be a stinger and no mistake, and Berryman's brown face is full of hope and pluck and eager excitement as he glances at his out-fielders and then at the in and signals to Lansing, "Let her go!"

Go she does, first ball of the game, with a "whiz" and a baffling curve at which Perry needlessly ducks, and over which the umpire makes a sprawling, straddling leap, and vociferates "Ball one!" Another, also wide, follows like a flash, and again does the stentorian shout of "Ball" ring over the field, and little Rockford boys, despite cautions to silence, begin to moan, and Rod feels a cold wave go down his back. Berryman eyes Lansing without a word, and Lansing, scowling a little, eyes Urbana's batsman, the lively Perrego.

This time our pitcher lifts high the ball in both hands, it seems, and balances on his right foot and twists his left leg about his right and gives a writhe that seems to suddenly unwind him and set him a spinning, and out of the midst of a whirl of legs and arms the white sphere shoots over the plate and the umpire bawls "Strike!" whereat there are cheers from big Rockfords and squeals from little ones, and Chunky Bill, who has donned his mask and come up behind the bat, hammers his big mit twice with his bare fist, hitches at his knickerbockers, and squats low. Lansing coils up again, again unwinds, and Perrego's bat flashes through the air and nearly swings him off his feet, as the ball lands with a "spat" in Cooper's stopper, and a yell of frantic delight goes up from Rockford's youngsters, drowning the umpire's unnecessary announcement, for the whole crowd sees the strike. Perrego flushes even through the tan,—that down shoot utterly fooled him,—and the Urbana players hitch uneasily on the bench. Another ball, almost before he has time to gather himself, and, stung by the shouts, he whacks at it savagely. A yell from Urbana's followers that begins full-lunged and forcible suddenly loses volume and then dies out in an "Ah-h!" The ball has popped up, an easy fly, and is circling slowly over first base. Perrego dashes for the base, so does Lansing to cover the vacant bag, for Berryman, with

his eye on the ball, is trotting slowly backward, and both dashes are needless for the fly settles in his broad palm and the first man is out. Hand-clapping and a school-yell greet the play, and "Perry" comes back to the bench as another blithe young fellow takes his place. No! not his place exactly, for he steps to the right of the plate and Rod edges off towards the field, for this is Powell, a famous left-hand thrower and batsman. Carelessly he swings the hickory over his shoulder and eyes the pitcher. The ball comes with a rush, and there is a resounding crack and a yell from all Urbana as, tossing aside his bat, the long left-fielder shoots for his base, where Berryman's left foot is already planted and his keen eyes are flashing straight across the field. Zipping over the springy turf the ball has sped, straight for shortstop, and that cool-headed youngster, carefully taught, stoops, gathers it with both hands, springs suddenly erect, and actually holds it a second, gazing calmly at first; then he lets go and away it flies across the diamond, lands in Berryman's clutches two yards ahead of Powell, and Rockford shrieks with joy. "Two out—no runs!" Then comes Rod's guest, Urbana's handsome young captain and second base. Only six balls has Lansing pitched, two men are out and none on bases. The head master is standing up and has forgotten what Urbana's professor of chemistry

was saying. Dr. Runyon's heart is with his boys. "Sock it to 'em, McClure!" say the Urbana backers. "Home run, Mac!" But Mac shakes his head. He hasn't gauged that boy pitcher yet, and if Perrego could do no better than pop up a fly, what can be expected of him? "Ball!" shouts the umpire. "Ball two!" "What's the matter, Lansing? Don't go wild now," are the murmurs in the crowd. "Ball three!" Merciful powers, boys, but that's bad! "Brace up, Lan!" and Lan braces. He ties himself in a knot again, then suddenly uncoils. Bang goes the captain's bat and away goes the batter, and away, too, goes the ball—high, higher—far over the fielders' heads, far out to the left center, and two pairs of white and blue legs are chasing madly from opposite directions, while the Urbana captain, circling well, has bounded across first and swung out for second. All in vain. All Rockford springs to its feet—scholars and tutors—and screams with ecstasy, for Jimmy Bolton "gets under" that sailing sphere and meets it as it comes whirling earthward, grasps it eagerly, then throws it hard for second, just to show what he could do were the runner not already out. Oh, luckless Urbana! You are "goose-egged by the Kid Nine!"

There is a scene of mad joy among the Rockford crowd,—of small boys hugging each other and dancing frantically. There is a din of shouts

and squeals and whistles as the blue-legged field comes trotting briskly in and the grays more soberly trot to their stations. There is a chorus of hand-clapping as Berryman whispers a word to big Nugent, Rockford's right fielder and hard hitter, and Nugent steps to the plate. Clem has picked up the ball and, just to set things going, starts it to shortstop, affects to take no interest in the first man at the bat until the ball is once more in his grasp, then with easy confidence faces him, lifts high both hands, lifts high his left knee, balances an instant on his right toe, then unlimbers all at once and sends the ball hissing towards the plate. Nugent ducks as though it were aimed at his head, whereat everybody laughs. Clem grins; then scowls, for the umpire shouts "Ball one!" and Clem meant it to split the air just over the plate. Clem steadies himself, repeats his gyrations; away goes the ball; whack! says the bat, and all Rockford springs to its feet again as Nugent streaks it for first, while the ball spins over the turf, straight as a die, just where no infielder can touch it. Up goes a howl of delight as Nugent darts across the bag before the ball comes back. Then up steps Billy Gifford, bat in hand, and Rockford's second batter is at the rubber. Two minutes later he is still there, with three balls, two strikes, and a brace of fouls called on him, and still Nugent hangs at first, unable to see

a way to second. The coachers are bidding him do everything but really run, but Goddard watches him like a cat, and twice sends the ball to the baseman in hopes of catching the runner napping. The tension is severe. The Urbana party is silent. Only the irrepressible small boys keep up their twitter, too nervous and excitable to be still. Nugent is dancing like a cork a little off first base, eagerly watching the ball, madly longing for a chance to make a dash for second, yet dreading to start lest that active catcher should get the ball there first, and all Rockford knows how Goddard can throw to bases. Possibly Clem thinks the game "easy pie"; possibly it is a prearrangement between McClure and himself to let the Rockford boys get a good start, encourage them amazingly, and then win the game in the last innings. Whether or no, he now gives Gifford a chance. The ball comes straight from the shoulder this time, and Gifford, stifling the longing to try to lift it for a home run, hits heavily down as he has been instructed, and the ball bounds fiercely over the pitcher's head and shoots midway between shortstop and Captain McClure, a "rattling" base hit and no more, but Nugent slides into third before it is fielded thither, and Rockford's yells are frantic. Then Gifford does a foolish thing. He is safe at first when, in hopes of catching Nugent, the ball is thrown in to third,

and, under cover of the shouts and cheers and hand-clapping, he loses his head and thinks to play sharp and steal a base. A louder yell goes up as he darts on for second, while the ball is still held by the opposing baseman. The collegian tosses it easily to McClure, who bends and rubs it down along Gifford's spine, as the would-be base stealer slides head-foremost for the bag, and the umpire waves him out. Gifford finds his feet but slowly, and looks foolish and bewildered as he brushes the dust out of his knickerbockers and ruefully trots back to the bench to meet Berryman's reproving shake of the head. "You can't take chances like that. We're not playing kids," says big Bob. "You could have had second in a minute easy. Goddard won't throw there with a man on third ready to come in. Nugent was still sprawled on the bag when you started. Watch Pepper now," and "Pepper," so-called because his real name is Salter, picks up a light bat and sends the first ball skyward, runs uncertainly at first as though he knows he might as well wait, and his doubt is confirmed. The ball comes slowly over and drops into shortstop's waiting hands. Two out, no runs, and all that is needed to score is a sharp, low crack at the ball. "Hit down, Jimmy!" orders Berryman, and the fourth player trots to the rubber, and Jimmy waits until he gets a good one and hits as directed, hard and down, and the

ball goes zipping across the infield and comes shooting over to first, fielded by McClure, while Jimmy is ten feet away from the base whereon he would be, and Rockford, too, is out. "Well," says Bob, "we've tied the score anyhow!" and silence settles over the field, as the nine take station for the second innings.

Lansing is still new to the Urbanas. The first four that came to bat are puzzled by his curves, and only scratch hits or easy pop-up flies result. Amid shrieks of joy from the younger pupils and shouts of applause from the elders, he actually strikes out young Mr. Porter, one of Urbana's society swells,—an amateur, proud of telling how he has played in practice games with Anson's men and held his own, sir, and made a home-run off even such a pitcher as "Smiling Mickey" when the Gothams were last in Chicago. Bob Berryman hugs his pitcher as the latter doffs his cap in response to the plaudits of the crowd. Such a feat is worth more than the Lambert Scholarship, as the holder of that benefice is willing to admit. "Now if we can *only* do something at the bat!" say the boys, as they cluster together at the bench. "Bunt it, Shanks, and beat it to first," are the cautions given to a tall, lanky fellow who is lunging up to the plate, a runner famous at Rockford Hall. Shanks scowls. He wishes to hit hard, but he obeys, for next behind him comes Buster,

as safe and sure a hitter as there is in the nine. "Steal second and 'Shonee will bat you in," Berryman has whispered, as Shanks chooses his stick, and the eyes of all are upon him as the first ball comes. An incurve, and Shanks wisely lets it by. The second is more to his taste. He quickly raises the bat, simply pokes it at the swift flying sphere, then races madly for first while the ball, checked in its course, recoils and rolls slowly up along the foul line, but luckily keeps inside. Clem springs for it, but it is as elusive as a straw hat in a high wind. Some one afterwards said Clem purposely fumbled the ball. At all events, Shanks bounds across the bag, two yards ahead of the throw, and then in the midst of frantic yells gathers himself and dashes for second, for the throw is high over the baseman's head, and nothing but McClure's magnificent play prevents its going out of bounds. He had sped to cover first the moment the bunt was made, and, running like a deer, stops it within five yards of the benches, even though he cannot recover in time to whirl about and throw to second. Shanks, panting, is safe on the bag when the ball lands in shortstop's hands.

And now comes Rod's turn. "A two-bagger, Buster!" "Smite her for a home, Rod!" "Give her a Shoshonee swat, Sioux Killer!" shout the boys, and a big burly man in a pearl-colored high hat, known as a "Tammany Tile" in the East,

steps over to Mr. Weld, who is eagerly watching the game. "So that's Jack Hammond's chum, is it?" he asks, and cordially shakes hands with the tutor. "He's a likely-looking youngster. You know I sent Jack to the Point,—I represent the Eighth District in Congress." Mr. Weld doesn't know it, but feigns, politely and diplomatically. "We all miss Jack," he says, "but West Point's the place for him. He's our finest mathematician. "Yes," says the Honorable Mr. Hammond, "I'm only afraid he's studied too hard here. The trouble with those examiners at the Point is they expect a boy to know everything that can only be had by hard study and then show no signs of wear. They've rejected five boys for me in less than three years. Gad! if this fellow lands on that ball squarely it'll be for a four baser sure," and the Congressmen looks admiringly at Rod's sturdy shoulders and deep chest. Four balls have been pitched, not one of them to Shoshonee's liking, though the umpire calls the second a strike, and the boy's eyes are blazing as he stands at the plate, quivering with excitement and eagerness, the bat well over his shoulder. Meantime, Shanks is playing away off second, striving to get a long start so that he may come sprinting home in the event of the promised base hit. The fielders are edging forward, ready for a swift throw to nab him at the plate. The fifth ball comes flashing

in on a slanting sunbeam, and Rod's shoulder seems hard behind the grain of the bat as it hits with resounding whack. Like a bird the ball goes soaring over second and, Rockford and Urbana both, the spectators seem to rise from their seats as though to follow it, while, to the music of madly triumphant cheers, Shoshonee speeds on his round. But the roar of triumph dies into something like a moan of apprehension, for Urbana's centre fielder, his eyes upward, is dancing swiftly backward. Rod tears past first base, but Shanks is glued to second. If he runs on a caught fly he, too, is out and he dare not quit the bag. Three seconds decide it. A wild, almost frenzied yell bursts from Rockford's throat, for just as the ball is landing in the nimble fielder's hands, his heel catches, he staggers, strives to recover himself, but cannot, and keels over on the broad of his back while the ball bounds harmlessly away. When that wandering planet is recovered and sent whistling homeward, Shanks is being pounded on the back and hand-shaken at the bench and Rod is breathing hard and joyously at third base. First run for Rockford, even if it wasn't a safe hit!"

Then Jimmy Duncan whacks at one of Clem's low "down shoots" and pops up a fly that McClure cannot decline, and then Holway, of the "Second Latin," a boy full of promise in field sports, drives a hot liner at the pitcher which he only partially

stops, and Holway scuds to first to be met there by his fate, picked up and fielded by that imp of a shortstop. Then, with two out and Rod on third, Malloy hits an easy one to Mr. Porter, which that young gentleman drops, and an instant later Rod comes bounding over the home plate, chased in by the ball, but safe and sound. The score is two to nothing when the next boy flies out to Perrego.

Then comes the third innings and—catastrophe. Urbana has begun to gauge Lansing. Two men have got their bases and been batted or sacrificed around to second and third when "Lefty" Leggett comes to the plate and, true to Hammond's parting injunction, Rod edges away from his base to cover the field. Thus far luck has been with him, not a grounder has come his way, but the very first ball Lansing sends at the tall left-hander is met by a swinging crack of the bat and driven like a shot, barely skimming the turf, as though to split in half the line joining the first and second base. All infielders are playing within the lines to head off the runner for home, and Rod has even less time than usual to leap in front, then to stoop and stop it. He never knows just how it happened. His left hand stings for an hour later. A groan of misery and disappointment rises from all Rockford as the ball goes bounding away into centre field, deflected from its course but hardly checked, and a big error is scored against poor

Buster, and a big, big lump rises in his throat again, as on that heart-breaking misplay two runners come bounding in, and Leggett safely "roosts" on second. The ice is broken, the score is tied and then beaten, for a sharp base hit brings Leggett home, and in their half Rockford is retired without a run. Poor Rod! He could cover his face and steal away and die of mortification, but a broad hand is laid on his shoulder as he sits mournfully at the bench, and Mr. Hammond violates the rules, with no one to object,—he being a representative in Congress,—by coming out and speaking to a player. "You're all right, youngster; Kelly himself might have fumbled that ball. You'll get your revenge before this game is over," and, glancing gratefully up, Rod's mournful eyes light for the first time on Jack Hammond's friend and uncle and Congressman. "I shouldn't mind so much," he begins, "only I promised Jack to wire,"—and then the thought is too much for him, and Rod chokes. "Never you mind, I say," says Mr. Hammond again. "I've been a base-ball crank for twenty years, and you'll come out all right before this game's over. I'm betting on it."

At last comes the ninth innings this fair June evening, just as the factory whistles at Rockford are tooting six o'clock, and the bells are chiming and the sun is throwing long slanting beams across the field. Rockford has been doing a little better,

and even Rod is taking hope and comfort, for a double play, two "assists," and two captured flies have been credited to his fielding, and he has hit safe and sure twice, batting in two runs in the seventh that offset the two he let in in the third; but the score stands 9 to 6 in Urbana's favor, and, as the friends of the collegians say, "They haven't half tried." But now McClure feels it necessary to increase the score. Three is no safe margin in base-ball, even against boys of seventeen, and he tells his men to hit for all they are worth this time, and hit they do. Before Lansing and his fellows can fairly realize what has happened, Perrego, Powell, and the captain himself have hit safely and got to their bags, for, to the misery of all Rockford, every base is full and only one man out when Mr. Porter steps up to the plate,—Porter whom Lansing struck out the first time they faced each other, Porter who missed the easy fly, Porter who feels that now is his grand chance to redeem his name and, by one magnificent hit to the far field, empty the bases and fill with joyous admiration the hearts of all Urbana.

It is a moment of drooping courage, almost of despair, for Porter can hit and has hit hard since his luckless beginning, and Berryman signals to his fielders and even motions back those who have closed in. Rod is surprised, but obeys. There is absolute silence for a moment as Shoshonee finds

himself once more back of the familiar base line. He wonders if anything can save them. Perrego is keeping close to third. There is no sense in risking anything now. Powell, however, is playing away out, almost midway between second and third, for he well knows that a throw to second to catch him would never be ventured with Perry ready to dash home. No fielder's trick can harm him where he stands, and no fly ball can land in fielder's hands before he can get back to the base. Both he and Perrego, therefore, are crouching like athletes preparing for a dash of a hundred yards. One sharp, low hit is all that is needed, and they see it in Porter's eye as he faces Lansing, and Lansing sees it, too. He cannot give him a base on balls now. He can only pitch fair and square and trust to fate and the fielders. Porter lets three balls go by, then lunges and, like a six-pound cannon shot, that ball whistles through space, a line hit, a sure hit, a safe hit if there ever was one, straight over Buster's head. Perrego and Powell spring to their dash for home, and are half way thither under full headway when checked by a terrific cheer from Rockford, and loud yells of warning from benchers, coachers, and Urbana generally. Whack went Porter's bat upon the leather. Whack an instant later goes the leather into Rod's stinging palm, for, leaping high, he meets it with his right and the arm flies back with

the force of the shock as though it would be torn from its socket, but the clutch of the eager fingers is on the ball and it is firmly grasped. Another instant and the boy has darted for second base, firmly planting his foot upon the sack as he springs by, and then, whirling in his tracks, throws "clean, swift, and sure" into Shanks's grasping hand at third base. "A triple! a triple play, by all that's glorious!" fairly screams Mr. Weld. "Striker out! Out on second and third! Side out!" shouts the umpire, but no man hears. In the twinkling of an eye; in the flash of a camera the prettiest, sharpest, most fatal play ever seen at Rockford is made, and Buster Ross is the hero of the day. Merciful powers, how the boys scream and shout and pound the benches and toss up hats and blazers, chairs and camp-stools, and how they cheer Shoshonee as he comes running in, blushing like a girl, and oh, so happy! It is a full minute before the game can go on. It is no easy matter for Perrego to realize that he and Powell are really out,—that the line drive was after all only a captured fly and it caught them off their bases. "My aunt, Rod!" shouts Berryman in his ears; "if Jack could only have seen that. By Jiminy, we'll beat 'em yet!"

Five minutes later Urbana is standing up on benches, chairs, and tables, for its famous college nine is flying signals of distress. Clem is getting

wild, and has given a base on balls to one of Rockford's "tail enders," a boy who hasn't made a single hit, and would have flied out if given half a chance. Burly Cooper "sacrifices" him to second, but loses his own head in the effort. Then Nugent sends him home with a beautiful drive, on which he, too, reaches second, and, a moment later, third on Gifford's long fly that Mr. Porter fails to "get under" in ample time, and Gifford, too, is safe. Pepper, too ambitious, strikes out, and then comes Daddy-Long-Legs—Shanks himself—to the bat, and, before he can crouch, an inshoot has stung him in the shoulder, and he trots to first base, rubbing his bruise, but grinning from ear to ear. Bases filled, two men out, two runs to tie the score and three to win the game. Was there ever such a stake?—and Buster Ross to bat.

Rod's heart is fluttering like a girl's, his nerves are all tingling, his head is almost swimming as he hears the shouts, long and loud, with which he is greeted. Never in all the history of Rockford Hall was excitement so intense. Never in its long and successful career has the head master known a moment to compare with this. It seems as though its name and fame—even its reputation for scholarship—are now trembling in the balance. Berryman, who follows Buster on the batting list, strives to say a word, but Rod cannot hear. Seats are abandoned, the whole concourse of people is

standing, the din is uproarious. Clem eyes the batsman warily and essays a smile. Rod's Scotch extraction shows itself in the intensity of his gaze. He is far too much in earnest to grin. It is a frown, if anything, that darkens his eyes, and his mouth is set like a trap. Two balls have sped by, narrowly watched, but avoided. Clem lets drive the third just as the sun shoots out from behind a bank of summer cloud low lying in the west, and the flying sphere comes tipped with gold. Rod's shoulder is behind the bat this time for all he's worth. Small boys say that night it sounded like a clap of thunder when bat met ball, but when the echo comes back from the school-house wall it is drowned in the mad yells of exultation of all Rockford, and the fielders are chasing furiously into deep right, and, one after another, Nugent, Gifford, and Shanks have crossed the plate, and there is no need for Rod to chase his legs off,—he has batted in the winning run.

"If I had it to do over again, young fellow," said Mr. Hammond that evening before he started for home, "you'd represent my district at the Point, and if I have it to do again or I can do it in any way, you'll get there, and don't you forget it!"

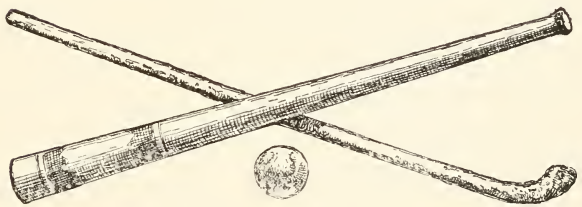
"Do you think, *can* you think he means it, father?" wrote the eager, happy boy to the captain that very night. "Yet, how can I go so long as

Jack Hammond holds it? They can never 'find' Jack in 'math' or any other study."

Just one week later, though, as the great school gathers for commencement exercises, good Dr. Runyon silently hands Rod a telegram. It is brief and to the point.

"Jack passed. Mowbray failed. His father has promised me to nominate Ross."

Signed "Hammond, M.C."



CHAPTER IX.

And both to Mr. Hammond and the doctor did the Honorable M.C. keep his promise, and our Rod was duly named a cadet candidate for future honors at the Point, but even then the fruition of his hopes was a long way off. He was only seventeen and could not be prepared to pass the entrance examination for admission that year, even in September, and Captain Ross wisely held that a boy who missed plebe camp was robbed of an invaluable experience. "Stick to Rockford and mathematics another year, my boy," he said. "Come out to Washakie for another vacation. Shoot and fish and ride and live in the mountains until fall. You'll be all the better for study," and Rod religiously carried out his father's wishes. A very grateful man was Captain Ross, and very grateful letters did he write to Messrs. Hammond and Mowbray for their kindness to his boy. Local politicians, you may be sure, made much complaint

in the Fifth Congressional District that this valuable scholarship had been given to "an outsider," but Mr. Mowbray contented himself with saying that Buster was a resident of the district,—that his mother's family, at least, lived in it,—that as the four boys he had appointed in three years had failed, his own among them, he merely wished to establish one of two things, that home boys were no worse than the "outsiders," so called, in case young Ross failed, and that there was collusion in favor of army boys in case he were admitted.

It took a year of hard work to fit Buster for the "preliminary," and Dr. Runyon and Mr. Weld and the captain himself and Rod, too, for that matter, had many anxious moments. Expert as he was on the playground, thorough as he grew to be in geography, history, and Latin, he still stumbled painfully in parsing, and only the hardest study enabled him to triumph over equations. Arithmetic he at last seemed to master, but there was still doubt and grave doubt as to how he would stand the long hard lessons and the complicated problems to be met, beyond all possibility of dodging, when once fairly started at the Point.

Rod was plucky and hopeful; Rod's mother was confident. Hammond wrote encouraging letters and often playful ones. "You gave me my first lessons in setting up," said he, along in April, "and

now I'm accused of 'boning' corporalship here. Well, it's true! I wish to wear the gold lace if for no other reason than that it'll be such rousing fun to be turned out over plebes and have you in my drill squad. Look out for yourself, Sioux Killer. I haven't told the fellows much about you, but Mowbray has been writing to two of the class he got to know during the few days he was here, and they have pumped me with questions by the hour."

At last came spring and Rod's transfer to the banks of the Hudson for a few weeks' careful coaching under Hammond's instructor of the previous year, and at last the physical examination, which he passed triumphantly. Then came the ordeal of the written tests, and never until months afterwards did Buster learn by how narrow a margin he finally passed the entrance gate, and was promptly turned over to the tender mercies of the drill instructors and measured for his plebe outfit.

Story after story has been written of cadet life at the Point, and in each and every one much stress has been laid on first impressions and much space been given to Fourth Class, or "Plebe," Camp. All this in Rod's case is to be omitted, for his story was like that of dozens of other young fellows, his experiences, life, and sensations practically the same as theirs, and his hours of

homesickness only a little less. All boys know some days of weariness of spirit, so trying is the routine, and many feel long hours of dejection and despond, and to poor Rod these latter came only too often. He went through the torments of plebehood like a man, did his guard and fatigue duty like a soldier, was cheery, hopeful, and an enviable fellow in his class just so long as they remained in camp. It was after the long ten months of barrack work and study began that his shortcomings became apparent. Starting in a far down section because of the alphabetical responsibilities of his name, he found before November that even R placed him too high, and that he had to drop into a still lower section in that dreadful algebraic course. In other studies he could hold his own. In ranks, in the gymnasium, and on the drill-ground he was the peer of any fellow in his class, a soldier from the ground up, but January nearly severed his connection with the corps. He passed only "by the skin of his teeth."

"If hard work can do it," he wrote to his father, "I still believe I shall master the course. Hammond is kind as ever. He's coming in to help and coach me on "trig" and geometry, and I can see plainly that our instructor tries to lift me along, though some of our fellows say he would rather find a cadet deficient than marry a fortune. I've no one to blame if I don't succeed,

not even myself, father, for you know well that I have studied hard and faithfully."

This letter was one that gave the veteran troop leader many a sad hour. It is true the boy need never blame himself if he failed to pass the next examination, thought Captain Ross, but is it true he has no one else to blame? Have not I some accountability for all the long years I let him waste upon the frontier, studying nothing but natural history? Mrs. Ross, on the contrary, was disposed to look at matters from a very different point of view. She was persuaded that the whole system at the Academy was in need of remodelling if, as Rod said, there was so much difficulty in coming up to the standard. Two of the younger officers of the regiment were on duty at the Point, and they wrote lovely things of Rod. He was one of the manliest boys in his class and one of the most soldierly. He was sure to be "made high" among the corporals, for his conduct was admirable and no one could beat him in soldierly bearing. He had never had a report for a "late" at roll-call or carelessness or inattention of any kind. He was liked by the old cadets and regarded with not a little jealousy, as sometimes happens, among his comrades the plebes. "Surely," said Mrs. Ross, "a boy so highly spoken of can be in no danger of being discharged. Surely they will not send away a young man of such ability

and character because he does not fully understand some utterly useless and impractical science." Unluckily for the good lady, Mrs. Ross was not a member of the Academic Board, and her arguments bore little weight. She sorely missed her big boy and wrote to him three or four times a week, and exacted of him that he should write letters as frequently and as long until the captain had to say that she was thereby taking up time that, under all the circumstances, could far better be employed in study or exercise, and begged that she be satisfied with one letter a week, written on Sundays. Mrs. Ross maintained that no boy was ever the worse for the time he took in writing to his mother, which as an abstract proposition does very well and is possibly true, but with all his love for her Rod found it very difficult to comply with the requirements unless he gave up to letter-writing the half-hour after supper he ought to spend in the open air. He worked on diligently, painfully, and, thanks to Hammond's assistance and his own earnest labor, he managed to make so reasonable a record in geometry and "descriptive" as to overcome the losses in "trig." He went up for the June examination with an anxious heart, was given at the board a famous demonstration that he happened to have been schooled on time and again, and made a very creditable recitation, and though away down near the foot of the class

in mathematics he, as he himself expressed it, "wriggled through" somehow, and two days later found himself safely landed on the winning side and the proud possessor of a pair of corporal's chevrons so high up on the list as to make him acting sergeant and color-bearer during his yearling camp,—the proudest, happiest summer he had known for years.

For nearly a month his father and mother were visiting at the Point, and the fond creature was there at camp day after day, eager to tell of Roddy's boyish deeds and doings, and so, much to his dismay, many of the exploits over which he used to brag at Frayne became noised about the corps. It was lucky for him they were so little known in his plebe camp,—that only vaguely did the old cadets understand that his school name of "'Shonee, the Sioux Killer," was builded upon certain facts in his past career. Warned by his father and Hammond, he had carefully refrained from any talk of his boy days, and but for his mother, the stories concerning Rod's swimming the Platte at nine years old and beating back single-handed the horde of Indians that swarmed for the scalp of Corporal O'Toole might never have been restored to circulation. Now, however, when he wished them buried, he found they were being bruited about, and, as the two officers of the —th who were there gravely declared Mrs. Ross's

description entirely free from exaggeration, it was conceded among the visitors at the hotel and among the families at the Point that Cadet Color-Bearer Ross was really a very remarkable young man. But cadets themselves are sceptical.

It led to something more, however, than cadet notoriety.

Rod was senior corporal of the guard one bright August morning towards the close of camp. His father had gone to the city to attend to certain matters of business before their return to the far West, and Mrs. Ross, as was her custom, had wandered down to the visitors' tent at camp where she hoped to see very much of her boy. Several young ladies with their cadet friends were already in possession, however, and Rod was a trifle shy. His own relief was on post at the moment, and he felt the full responsibility of his charge over those six fledgling warriors, most of them plebes, and he declined to remain at the visitors' tent, but placed a camp-stool for his mother just under the spreading branches of a little tree close by the first guard tent, and, having secured the consent of the cadet first classman on duty as officer of the guard, there he stood leaning on his rifle and listening to her questions and comments, yet all the time lending attentive ear for possible calls from the sentries, and occasionally watching the movements of the two who were visible from his point of observation.

Even other mothers and other fellows' sisters among the groups of visitors agreed that he was a very manly, presentable young soldier as he stood there, and by this time, the stories of his swimming the Platte and scourging the Sioux being in full swing, the eyes of many were upon him, much to his embarrassment, but more to his mother's delight.

The artillery drills were going on at the time,—the fourth classmen at the foot battery south of camp, while the "yearlings," with prodigious clatter of hoofs and jingling of chains and rumbling of wheels and stirring bugle-blasts and hoarsely shouted commands and stunning discharges of the guns, were leaping like monkeys about the caissons as they darted from one point to another, often lost to sight in clouds of dust and smoke. So rapid and exciting grew the drill at last that everybody became absorbed in it, and camp-stools were moved almost upon the sentry post of Number One on the west front of camp, and just towards the fag end of the hour the battery instructor started his dozen spirited teams at full gallop from near the foot of the plain and swung "in battery" at top speed just in front of camp. With no little effort the caisson-drivers reined in their horses at the first signal, and sliding over the gravelly surface gradually came to a halt and began aligning to the right as the dust-cloud

lifted. Meantime, the guns had gone bounding straight to the front, and while the cannoneers had sprung from their seats on the caissons and gone sprinting to their stations on the new line, the gun teams, still at full gallop, essayed to whirl about, describing their loop at the same instant, and only reining up long enough to permit the gunners to unlimber and cry "Drive on," then drop the trails of the guns so as to throw the muzzles straight to the front and open fire. It was a race to see which gun would be the first to blaze away, and a race such as one can rarely see the like of unless it be among the Cossack batteries of Russia. If a cadet hadn't as many lives as a dozen cats some of their number would be killed every day.

Now, as luck would have it on this particular morning some of the children from the officers' quarters had brought over to camp a number of little friends who were summering in the neighborhood of the Point. Children reared in a garrison speedily learn the military rules and regulations and more readily observe them, perhaps, than they do those which are entirely parental. City-bred boys and girls, however, are less apt to do so, and there were three youngsters of twelve or fourteen in the party who seemed crazed with desire to "show off" before their friends and to place themselves in some position of imminent

danger. Twice had Rod as corporal of the guard been compelled to warn these little men that they could not be allowed to run out on the plain in front of the guns, but, boylike, they looked upon his objections as officious interference. The officer of the guard, a swell young first classman, was seated on a camp-stool chatting with an elder and very pretty sister of one of the boys referred to, and he, too, noting her anxiety, had remonstrated with the lad, but not in a manner to make much impression. He was too desirous of pleasing the entire family to venture on offending a juvenile brother. Mrs. Ross was talking eagerly with her boy as the battery came thundering up the plain, and all of a sudden there came a scream of mortal terror,—"Larry! Larry! Come back!" and the young lady sprang to her feet and was stretching out her helpless arms to the graceless rascal of a brother, who, followed by an admiring friend, was dancing out upon the glaring, gravelly surface directly in front of the galloping teams. Before Mrs. Ross realized the trouble, Rod had dropped his rifle, and, springing out beyond the group of spectators, he swooped down upon the pair, and collaring both, a muscular hand to each, he half pushed, half dragged them out of the way, and not an instant too soon. The right gun of the battery, whirling around, nearly rolling over as it did so,

Collaring both, a muscular hand to each, he half pushed, half dragged them out of the way.

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dashed by within three feet of his kicking, struggling captives, and but for his prompt action there is little doubt that, bewildered by the unlooked-for rush of the team to its right as it swung into battery, the two venturesome youngsters would have been run down. As it was, like most other boys when summarily pounced upon in public and interrupted in some prank, they were furious at being placed in so ridiculous a light, and one of them, bursting into tears and impetuous speech, declared that his father would make it hot for Rod when he came up next day, and used further language that spoke ill for the educational advantages of Murray Hill.

But the pretty sister was profuse in her thanks, and came over to Mrs. Ross, who was a nerveless witness of the affair, to express her gratitude and to beg that they pay no attention to Larry's furious outbreak. Larry and his equally abused but far more reasonable companion had by this time dried their tears and started for the omnibus up by the hotel, and the next thing noticed of them they were in lively conversation with a portly lady who drove up in a carriage.

How many times out of ten, when a boy goes to tell his story of wrongs to his devoted mother, does he tell the truth? When Master Lawrence Farwell's mother alighted from her carriage that eventful morning and started for camp it was with

the avowed intention of appealing to the commandant of cadets and having Cadet Corporal Ross reduced to the ranks in general orders that very night at parade for brutal assault and inexcusable violence towards her precious boy. Larry had declared he was just doing nothing, only standing there looking on at the drill, when that mean, interfering Mr. Ross ran out and grabbed him and hit him and choked him and shoved him right in front of all the people, and he wouldn't stand it.

Meantime, another mother had been crooning over her boy, and that was Mrs. Ross. Rod himself knew perfectly well that he was in no personal peril. He had been to light battery drill time and again, knew just where the horses and guns would turn and twist and just how to avoid them. He knew he had done nothing heroic. If anything, he was troubled because he had had to dart out there before all that crowd and run those struggling youngsters out of harm's way, but Mrs. Ross thought otherwise. In her mind her boy had performed an act of signal bravery and devotion, had saved two lives at the imminent peril of his own, and should be crowned with laurels or awarded the cross of honor and named in General Orders because of it. She never thought to look where the disgusted Larry had gone. She never dreamed that by any human possibility could there be found a single human being to entertain

an opposing view. Already she was picturing to herself, as she eagerly questioned Rod as to whether he was sure, *sure* he had received no injury, how beautiful it would all be at parade that night when the ringing voice of the cadet adjutant should proclaim to the statue-like battalion and to the hundreds of visitors the promotion of Cadet Corporal Ross for heroic conduct during battery drill that morning. Already she had received not a few congratulations, and Rod, blushing, awkward, and confused, was striving to get away, when there suddenly appeared an angering woman on the scene, and in tones never to be forgotten these words fell upon the ears of all:

"Is this the young man who has dared to assault my son?"

In an instant the young lady had interposed. "Mother!" she cried. "Indeed, indeed, you have been misinformed! Indeed, if you had seen what Larry was doing——"

"That will do, child," was the imperious anwer. "You always take sides against your brother. I have heard. I shall go to the commandant with my demand for justice."

And a very lively and exciting scene was suddenly precipitated upon a large and deeply interested array of visitors, many of whom, knowing Mrs. Ross, were only wondering what she would say when sufficiently recovered from her amazement

to say anything at all. But before that lady could open her lips another voice, a very quiet one, but most authoritative, was heard, and there, just dismounted from his horse, looking somewhat warm from the drill, but speaking very coolly all the same, there stood the young battery commander and instructor.

"I am commandant to-day, Mrs. Farwell, in the absence of Colonel H——," said he, "and as I saw the whole occurrence, will you permit me to say that the promptness of Mr. Ross was all that saved your boy from being run over, and I shall so inform both the commandant and Mr. Farwell when they return to-morrow. I had dismounted to congratulate Mrs. Ross. May I not tender my congratulations also to you?"

Buster always thought Lieutenant —— a rather cold, unappreciative officer, but that day he could have hugged him, so could his mother, but Mrs. Farwell, poor woman, was utterly at a loss now what to say or do.

"I do not comprehend," she began, but then a dozen voices chimed in, of men and women witnesses of the affair, all bent on pointing out to her how utterly she had been misinformed and how great was Larry's peril when rescued. And in the midst of the clatter Rod begged his indignant mother to come away, and led her flushed and almost tearful to the visitors' tent. Later in

the day she declined to see Mrs. Farwell when that lady sent up her card.

But this trifling incident, which caused no little laughing comment among the visitors to the Point, was destined to weave quite an important part in Rod's future. The very next evening, just as he was donning his belts and shako for parade, the commandant's orderly summoned him to headquarters. There at the entrance to the big marquee sat Colonel H—— with the artillery lieutenant and a third gentleman, a gray-whiskered, keen-eyed civilian, who arose as Rod halted at the prescribed distance and raised his hand in salute. The commandant, too, arose from his chair and, extending his hand, said, in the kind way that was habitual with him,—

"I wish to add my commendation to that you have already received, Mr. Ross, for your prompt action during battery drill yesterday morning; and here is a gentleman who desires to thank you in his own name,—Mr. Farwell."

Whereupon the civilian cordially took Rod's hand in both his own and said, "You rendered me a very great service, sir, and taught my boy a much needed lesson, and I am very grateful to you and very sorry to learn that in her agitation my wife said some utterly unjustifiable things. Lawrence is our only boy, our baby in fact, and has been sadly spoiled, but I hope you can make

some allowance for his mother. When you are older you'll find that many others are apt to attach undue weight to the doings or sayings of an only son."

And Rod felt the blushes surging up to his temples again. He had begun to realize the force of that statement already.

Before Captain Ross left for the West, however, a cordial understanding and regard had sprung up between Mr. Farwell, Rod, and himself, despite the fact that the two ladies maintained towards each other an awful severity of mien when they happened to meet.

"There may come a time when I can be of service to you, Roderick," said the New Yorker, "and if it should so happen, command me. In any event I shall not lose sight of you." And, oddly enough, the time came.

Although of different classes, Hammond and Rod had planned to room together when the former should return from cadet furlough and barrack life again begin. The mathematical course of the third class year was one to which Rod looked forward with keen anxiety, but with Hammond to coach and aid him there would be less to fear. As luck would have it, however, the list of cadet officers was revised the day after the furlough class returned, and Hammond, to his surprise and delight, was raised to the rank of first

sergeant of the second company, or Company "B." The drill regulations of Upton were still in vogue and the cadets were assigned according to size, and Rod, who had shot up like a weed, was one of the tall, muscular athletes assigned to Company "D" on the extreme left. Nor could he induce any of the corporals of Company "A" to exchange with him. As first sergeant of "B" Hammond had to room in the third or fourth division of barracks, while Rod, much to his disappointment, although he had been raised a peg or two higher on the list of corporals, and was now third in rank, had to go over to the far west wing and take for a room-mate a handsome, reckless, daring, but absolutely unbalanced fellow whose academic days were surely numbered.

Poor Rod! He studied as best he knew how. He worked hard and faithfully. He grew pale and weary-eyed, but all to no purpose. "Analytical" was too much for him, and his marks were as low as his face was long, so low that despite excellent conduct, fine soldierly bearing, and a fair standing in other studies, nothing but absolutely perfect work at examination would save him. The story is too sad, yet too well known. Dozens of ambitious and earnest young fellows have found themselves unable to master the intricacies of mathematics, and, yielding to the inexorable law, have had to fall out. Rod's instruc-

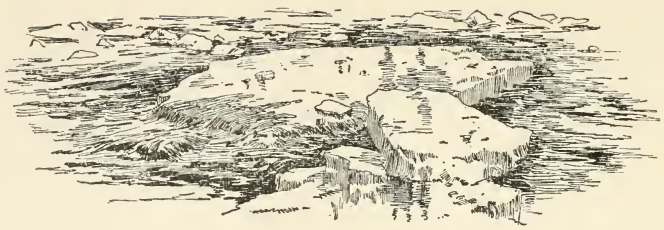
tor did his best by him, and Rod showed himself grateful and appreciative, but only by the narrowest squeeze was he carried through the gate in January,—his room-mate laughingly accepting his own deficiency as a matter of course and, with half a dozen other third classmen, doffing the cadet dress and donning "cits" once more, while Rod, with Calculus to cheer him up the hill to June, faced at the foot of his class that still harder subject, but with hardly a grain of hope or confidence in the result.

"Turned back to join the new third class in September," was the decision of the Board in Rod's case in June, and he went on cadet furlough in anything but bright spirits. His father and mother were still in the far West and they welcomed him lovingly and strove to comfort him, the one with the belief that another year would enable him to triumph over the difficulties of the course, the other with the characteristic assurance that the fault lay solely with his instructors. But Rod had grown older and wiser and had his own views. The young officers, recent graduates, endeavored to encourage him, and were surprised at his lack of faith. In his other studies he showed the effect of his earnest work, and his knowledge of the practical side of drill regulations made him quite their equal if not, in some cases, their superior, for Rod was soldier, as has been said,

every inch of him. "It seems a shame to think we can't have him in the cavalry," was what more than one officer was heard to say, as they watched Rod's easy seat and practised horsemanship, and perhaps the father thought so too, though he uttered no complaint. "Do your best, my boy. No man on earth can do more. Master that mathematical course if you can, but if you can't," —and here with moistening eyes the veteran soldier took his stalwart boy by the shoulder and turned him squarely towards him,—"if you can't, Rod, come back home to your mother and to me and we'll welcome you lovingly as ever."

Rod hesitated a moment before replying; then raising his head, he looked his father full in the face.

"I used to think I could be content to come back and start a ranch out here somewhere, but that's all in the past, father. I know there's only one thing to suit me, and that is the cavalry, and if I can't win it through the Point there's yet another way. I shall try, father—from the ranks."



CHAPTER X.

Another year went by with Buster, now a stalwart fellow nearly six feet tall and as sinewy and active as any Indian. Bravely and patiently he stood to his work, mourning not a little over the enforced separation from his original classmates, with whom he was deservedly popular, yet striving to make himself at home among the new. This year he worked well up among the "teens" of the class in general standing and passed the June examination with comparative ease, though still far down in mathematics. Again his father and mother spent a portion of the summer near him during camp, and Rod was one of the first sergeants of the battalion and a very efficient cadet non-commissioned officer. Again they left him with loving wishes and fond anticipation, but Rod and his father both fully understood that the most trying year of the course was ahead of him, and that many a lively young soldier, hopeful and

over-confident after his successful passage of the middle barrier, had been tripped and thrown by "mechanics" and chemistry in the second class year.

The autumn, sad and sombre, yielded to the early snows of winter, and the days grew shorter and shorter as the Christmas holidays came on; so, too, grew Rod's letters. "I cannot do more," he wrote. "I have been hoping against hope and struggling against fate. I have no head for mathematics. It was mistaken kindness to let me try again last year. It only prolonged the fight and set me back still farther in the race for a commission. My class—my own class—will graduate in a little over six months and be lieutenants in the army by the end of June. Well, come what may, I'll be in the army too."

The Ross's were far across the continent now. The old regiment had gone to the Pacific slope, and they had drunk Rod's health and happiness on his twenty-first birthday just as the first snows were mantling the bold heights about the Point, while the sun still beat warm and ruddy about the adobe walls of old Camp Sandy in Apacheland. The captain was growing very gray and wrinkled, and looking eagerly forward to the promotion so long due him and to release from the exactions of troop duty. He strove hard to control his anxiety as January came and to believe that Rod might still

succeed, but Rod himself would hold out no hopes and Hammond was ominously silent.

One night, just as the trumpets were sounding tattoo and a soft wind was whispering up the deep sheltered valley from the sand wastes far to the south, a messenger from the telegraph-office entered with the fateful brown envelope in his hand, and Captain Ross took it, read, and walked out into the dark. Mrs. Ross was visiting somewhere among the neighbors.

This was all it said:

"Enlisted for the cavalry to-day. I'll win it yet."

No word of repining, no word of reproach to any one, no word of the wrench it must have cost to say good-by to all that throng of stanch, soldierly comrades with whom he had lived and worked and hoped for more than three long years; no word of disappointment, nothing but pluck and cheer and manful determination, and the old soldier bowed his head upon his arm as he leaned on the gallery overlooking the dark lowlands at his feet where rushed the flowing river, and over the waste of leagues and leagues that separated him from his only son his heart went out in yearning, in pity and compassion and tenderness unspeakable, for all the sorrow and disappointment that had been the boy's lot, but in pride and love ten times as great because of the manful accept-

ance of his fate. "Quit you like men; be strong," was the text that had inspired Ross's own rugged, honest, God-fearing life. It was a heartbreak to think of the three years and a half spent in cadet gray striving for the blue and finding only failure at the end, but not one hour had been wasted or thrown away. Rod would be all the better equipped for the race in the new field. For weal or woe it mattered not, the boy had indeed acquitted himself like a man,—had indeed been strong.

They were gathered in the club room, quite a party of the officers that night, when Ross came in, an unusual thing for him, and the steward, at his bidding, set fresh glasses and filled them with sparkling wine, and chat and laughter ceased, for the senior captain's face was grave.

"We drank my boy's health a few weeks back," he said, "and wished him speedy promotion, and you'll all bear me out in saying he has done his duty like a man. He'll be none the worse for cavalry drill, my friends, because he couldn't fully grasp the mechanism of molecules. One of these days he may be one of us, but for the time being he means to fight his own way." There was a choke in his voice as he finished. "Let us drink to Trooper Ross."

And so another year went by, and neither by the old regiment nor by the lads in gray at the

Point was Shoshonee seen again. Lovingly they often talked of him in the brief half-hour of recreation that followed supper, and many a cadet —first and second classmen both—would gladly have reopened communication with him, but Rod did not write. For several months, indeed, no one knew just where he was. He had enlisted in New York City immediately after receiving his discharge,—a ceremony that cost the adjutant of the Academy the saddest hour he had known in years. He had given their final papers to dozens of deficient cadets at every examination for three years past, but Rod's pale face and uncomplaining sorrow were too much for him.

"I couldn't feel worse if it were myself, Mr. Ross," he said, as he took Rod by the hand.

"Well, you'll bear me out in this, sir, then," was Rod's reply. "No man can say I haven't done my best."

They tried to find out to what post he had been sent, but the recruiting officer replied that young Ross had asked that no information be given. But when next October came the corps were kept no longer in ignorance. A letter was received from Lieutenant Hammond, graduated only in June and assigned to the —th, with station far out in Wyoming.

"I joined my troop in the Black Hills, marching home a week ago," wrote he, "and three days

later I went on as officer of the guard. That night, late, a courier rode into camp with despatches, and I sprang up from a doze to receive him. The firelight flickered on his face as he stood there by his horse's head, dusty, travel-stained, but straight as an arrow, and neither dust nor a fuzzy beard could disguise him. As I stepped towards him with outstretched hand, he drew back a half pace and whipped his hand up to his hat-brim and ground his heels together. 'I am Corporal Ross, sir,' said he. 'You're that and more too, dear old man,' I cried, and had my arms around him in a minute. You should have seen the guard stare, but they understood it all soon enough. Shoshonee is a corporal in Captain Ray's troop and a candidate for commission, and he'll get it yet, for Ray says there isn't a better trooper in his whole outfit, and if there's a captain in the cavalry that knows a trooper when he sees one, it's that same Ray."

Two years as a non-commissioned officer must a soldier serve before he can hope to change the chevron for the shoulder-strap, and another year still had Rod to ride boot to boot with the roughest fellows in the ranks; but no favor did he ask, —no help from anybody. Once in a while there came fond letters from his father, now a major of cavalry, serving in a distant field. Every week there came fond, sometimes foolish, letters from his

mother, and Rod welcomed them tenderly, and stowed them away in his little barrack box and went silently, sturdily, on his way. He was the crack "rough rider" in his troop, a superb gymnast and drill instructor, and Captain Ray's recruits somehow or other, were "licked into shape" quicker than those of any other company, and it was well understood that nothing but the fact that Ray had no vacancy kept Shoshonee still a corporal. "Ross is sure of a sergeantcy before the end of his term," said the men, but the time came, and came soon, when sergeant's chevrons, even, were not considered.

Our story opened one night in June within the walls of old Fort Frayne. Many a change had been wrought in the *personnel* of the post. Of all the men we met and knew in the eventful Centennial year of '76 not one was stationed at the fort when, some fourteen years later, there broke out among the Sioux Indians gathered at the great reservations to the east what was called "the Messiah craze." Indians have their beliefs as have other men, and far and wide among the villages of the red men from the Missouri to the Pacific had been carried by runners and preached by medicine-men the story of the second coming of the Son of the Great Spirit,—an Indian God who was to restore to the faithful among his people the dominion of the wide waste of lands wrested from

them by the pale-faces, who was to lead them in a war of extermination of the whites, and, once and for all time, make the Indian lord of the Western world. Indian worship takes its form in weird and uncouth dances, and the nights were red with the reflection of the dance-fires set in every village far and near, and, despite the efforts of their wiser chiefs, young men and old, the warriors of the great Dakota nation left the agencies and took to the war-path, convinced that the time had come for the final battle. All on a sudden, after years of comparative peace, a general war was forced upon the frontier, and again the cavalry were hurried to the once familiar fields, and among the first troops to cross the Platte was "Buster's."

It was midwinter. The snow was deep in the mountains. There had been a thaw in the Park country of Colorado, and the Platte was running bank full and whirling huge cakes of ice thick spread upon its turbid flood. The garrison of Fort Frayne had marched some forty miles up-stream before finding a crossing, and their trail through the snow-drifts was still fresh when the squadron of the —th, led by Captain Ray, reached the post after a long day's march through the passes of the Medicine Bow. All that was known of the Indians was that, after "jumping" the agency, they had fled westward up the valley of the Cheyenne, killing, burning, and destroying as

they went. It was hoped that the command from Frayne might intercept them and recapture the women and children the Indians were carrying away. It was to reinforce that little command that Captain Ray had been hurried to the front. Reaching the military reservation of Fort Frayne an hour before nightfall, the captain had ordered the four troops under his command to bivouac on the flats to the west of the post, and be ready to march at dawn. Other captains might have put their horses into the abandoned stables and their men into the vacant barracks, but not Ray. That would be a distinct "let down" from the necessities of the campaign. Men and horses both were out to rough it. But he sent in for any mail that might have been received, and about eight o'clock in the evening a young officer came over to the shelter-tents of Captain Ray's own troop and asked for Corporal Ross. The first sergeant sprang up and stood attention, ankle-deep in snow, and looked about him. "He's down at the picket line most like, sir," said he. "I'll send for him." And a trumpeter went on the run to where the troop horses, tethered at the rope, were munching their hay and wondering whether they could lie down in that cold white blanket, and there, rubbing his charger's legs, was Buster. The men wondered why he called that bay troop horse "Bep."

"Loot'n't Hammond wants you, corporal," said the trumpeter, anxious not to be too polite, as this was a candidate for commission; and Buster quickly arose and went ploughing through the snow to where a camp-fire was burning in front of the sergeant's tent. At sight of Hammond, his old playmate and friend, he halted, stood attention, and raised his hand in salute. The salute was as gravely and precisely returned, and then the lieutenant spoke. I wish I had the power of conveying his very tone, first officially dignified, then characteristically, impetuously affectionate.

"Corporal, I sent for you because you ought to see this paper. Our friend Mr. Farwell has gone to Washington as senator. Now, Rod, old boy, we'll have that commission!" And roughly-clad, roughly-bearded troopers saw the lieutenant hold forth an eager hand. It did not surprise them. They had seen him slap that same corporal on the back. They knew the story of the two by this time.

But Rod was true to his name and stood bolt upright, and unbent not a whit.

"Even a senator can't pull a man up from the ranks except in accordance with law nowadays, sir," said he, "and I wouldn't ask it if he could, —until I'd done something to deserve it."

"Well, your chance 'll be here soon enough, or

I'm a duffer. Rod, old boy, you don't have any grounders to stop these days. What if the war game gave us both a chance for a double play for the honors of old Rockford?"

"Then I'd jump at the chance, higher than I had to jump for that red-hot liner the day we larruped Urbana," was the answer.

Just as the wintry dawn was breaking over the far eastward hills, Captain Ray was roused by a messenger, and the messenger brought direful tidings. The Indians, quitting the valley of the South Cheyenne, were raiding that of the Dry Fork as they pursued their swift and untrammelled flight, and word must be got to Colonel Farrar, who had gone out at the head of the Frayne squadrons, and who was probably now marching eastward perhaps forty miles away to the north of Ray's bivouac in the snow. "Well, who," said Ray, pointing to the ice-tossing river, roaring between its frozen banks, "who could possibly cross that stream and intercept the colonel? The best we can do is to send our lightest riders out on an eighty-mile stern chase, crossing forty miles above here where they did."

Dozens of the men were already up and eagerly listening, and one of these sprang forward and stood boot-deep in the snow before his captain.

"I'm your man, sir."

"You? Why, Corporal Ross! Oh! I remem-

ber, this is your old stamping-ground, and I know your pluck, but, great Scott! I can't risk one of my best men with one of my best horses on any such mad attempt. The ice would crush you and your horse both."

"Wait till it's lighter and I'll show the captain where I crossed on a boy pony when I was only nine, when the water was just as high, though there wasn't any ice. Now we've got the ice to contend with, but we have size and strength and determination to oppose against that. Meantime, have I the captain's permission to get ready?" and Rod's fingers and lips were twitching in his eagerness and hope.

Then Captain Ray sprang up and held out his hand. Troopers do not always use the choicest language on the frontier. They know too many moments of intense excitement.

"My God, Corporal Ross," said this Kentucky soldier, "I made a ride away down yonder on the South Cheyenne the same summer you made your first trip, and it counted for something, too, at the time, but compared with what you're going to try right up here it wasn't a ride worth mentioning. You're just a man after my own heart, sir, and you shan't be balked, sir,—you shan't be balked!"

And so it happened that, an hour later, an eager group of troopers, some in saddle, some boot-deep in the snow, were crowding at the brink

where the Platte went roaring over some rocky rapids half a mile up-stream from camp. The weather was oddly mild for Wyoming. There were indications of more snow and lots of it, and that underfoot was already soft, and what far-down Easterners among the men called "slumpy." There's no place like the army for learning the dialects of all these United States. And through the soft, hazy atmosphere the rushing river was everywhere plainly visible to the opposite shore. Here at the rapids it was swift and raging, tossing the ice-cakes through clouds of white foam, but it was shallow, whereas, for miles above or below it would everywhere sweep the tallest horse off his feet. And here just mounting were two tall troopers. The saddles were stripped off their strong cavalry horses. All the weight of saddle and saddle-bags, lariat, picket-pin, side-lines, halter, overcoat, shelter-tent, carbine, sabre, and sockets was left at camp. Sniffing excitedly and stamping the snow as though they well knew a race was ahead and they were to be the centres of attraction, the bony, muscular chargers looked fit match for their riders, except in height. Tall horses never turn out well on frontier duty. Light bridles hung on their heads, and, in place of saddle, each wore a folded blanket, covered by a poncho, which was secured by the surcingle. Other equipment had they none. The riders, too,

were oddly clad for a winter dash. The boots were gone and the overcoats, but fur caps, gauntlets, and heavy, blanket-lined canvas jackets hid the upper man of each, while legs and feet seemed oddly swathed in black rubber. Underneath those folds were warm woollen socks with Shoshonee leggings and moccasins. The rubber was bound with thongs over and around their feet and legs to high up on the thigh. It was a hard garb to mount in. "Give me a hand, Tommy," said Rod, thrusting his bandaged hoof into the ready grasp of a stooping comrade. "Now up!" and he was astride. "Now help the lieutenant," and in an instant the second was perched on his charger. And then Captain Ray's voice was heard.

"Now, Hammond, you clearly understand. You're simply to follow the corporal till you reach the bank. You've got to flounder through the ice and rapids and may have to swim the pool beyond, but till you strike t'other shore Ross leads. Then you command. I reckon that's all. You know your other orders. Find that column, turn 'em up towards Dry Fork. Tell 'em we follow by their trail, and we'll ride till we reach 'em, ready for the fight; and if between us we don't whip the hide off those murdering Sioux then I'll give up my commission. Ride for all you're worth, fellows, and—and God go with you."

Two gauntleted hands go up to the cap-brims

in salute. Each man gives a final hitch to his pistol-belt. Rod takes off his gloves and stows them in the breast of his campaign shirt, Hammond follows suit. There is one quick glance around, one brief word of good-by, and then—Oh, the scene that follows! Rod turns sharply and puts his sturdy bay straight for the edge of the rapids. "In with you, Bep!" he shouts, and, though amazed and half shrinking, the trained troop horse makes the plunge. Only knee-deep at first, and though he snorts and shivers, Bep is in and at it, the white waves hissing under his belly. Warily his rider watches the swift-shooting ice-cakes. They come big and unbroken here, but many are banged into pieces before they reach the foot of the "sault." Warily Rod checks Beppo to let some big ice-raft pass in front, then pushes him on again to gain another yard or two before another check. He has gone full twenty yards before he strikes deeper holes, into which Bep plunges, with the water foaming about his breast. Now his rider turns, flashing-eyed, and signals "Come on!" and in an instant Hammond urges "Rockford" into the unseen tracks of "Beppo the Second," and a gasp goes up from trooper lungs along-shore. Two of their best and bravest, two who are loved by both officers and men, are fairly launched upon their perilous mission, with the roaring depths of the swollen stream still ahead of them,—with fifty

yards of seething water still between them and the northern shore.

And now Bep is plunging indeed! Down one instant in some unseen trap; up with quivering, dripping flanks the next. Once a groan goes up from the hitherto speechless crowd along the bank. "My God, he's down! He's stumbled!" Then a cheer of exultation, for Rod rides again gallantly aloft. "Bravo, Buster! Bully boy, Ross!" they shout from shore. Now he's in the heart of the rapids and the waves and the ice leaps high. God guide him now indeed!

There is a moment in which Bep seems to falter and to be trying to smell his way, for his black muzzle is sheer in the water. Then up comes the gaunt head. High rises the bridle hand, for, with one determined plunge, the massive shoulders sink into the huge wave that rises in mid-stream, and a shiver goes through the crowd of eager watchers. A big ice-cake sweeps on the next lift and seems to charge directly at them, and yells of warning rise from the watchers' lips, and Ray, pale and pulseless, has just lifted his hands to his lips to shout through them to Hammond not to dare another step, when gallant Beppo again finds his footing, and, urged now, seems fairly leaping through the icy waves. Hammond hears no sound from shore. He is closely watching Rod, only waiting for his signal, and now drives Rockford

straight into that same wave. It seems to burst over the withers of the gallant horse, but he never heeds it. It's a game of follow my leader, and in a moment he, too, is leaping and plunging in Beppo's wake. But Rod guides steadily on. He knows what they on shore do not, that in a moment more deep water must sweep them off the ledge into the boiling pool below, and there it's over five feet deep and the brave beasts must swim. Heavens, what a cry goes up next moment as the leading trooper is seen to suddenly swerve, to go sweeping sideways with the stream, and is for the moment lost to view! Then a mad hurrah, for a fur cap is being waved exultingly over his reappearing head, and the next minute Bep is seen gallantly striking out for shore. By all that's wonderful, he has reached the safe slack water of the pool and is fighting straight for the northern bank, straight at least as horse can go through the floating ice. Look! He's waving Hammond to come on, and, setting his teeth, almost shutting his eyes, and with a murmured prayer, Hammond drives his unwilling horse ahead, is in turn swept sidewise and half submerged, and in another moment, dripping, but triumphant, is following Rod up the opposite bank.

And there with heaving flanks and drooping heads the horses stand, while, glowing with exulta-

The two riders wave rejoicingly their fur caps in answer to the frantic cheers from the hither shore.

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tion despite the icy bath, the two riders wave rejoicingly their fur caps in answer to the frantic cheers from the hither shore. Well, well might they, the two old playmates, glory in such a double play as that!

Now off, one moment, to cut loose the lashings and strip away the ponchos and toss the now useless rubbers on the bank, then each takes one rousing pull at the flask the doctor has given them with his strict injunctions. Then once more they mount, and, with a parting wave of the hand, away they go over the same old snow-covered prairie. In another hour they are riding past Eagle Butte, past the Reno road, and so on into the heart of a falling snow-cloud, riding like the wind, while Ray's bugles are sounding the gallop miles away to the south-west, across the conquered waters of the Platte.

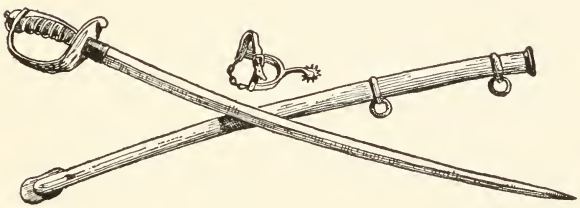
Oh, what a story it made about the camp-fires when, long weeks after, the short, fierce campaign being closed, a famous gathering was held there of famous cavalry regiments! and they say it was enough to make strong men grow blind to see the meeting between stern, soldierly Major Ross and his now famous son. They say that Rod was for standing to attention, with his hand at salute, but the father heart burst all bounds of military etiquette. The major flung himself from his horse and, with something like a great sob of joy and

pride and thanksgiving, gathered his boy to his breast.

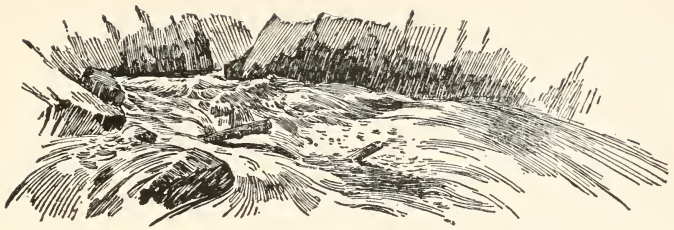
And a famous night we had of it at Leavenworth four months later. Of course all official credit, praise, and recommendation had been made, and colonels and generals had pleaded for the immediate promotion of our brave "Buster," but you boys at home have no idea how little that amounts to. A medal of honor was of course promptly accorded both Hammond and Ross, for that costs nothing; and while we are talking of this, about four years later, by which time Hammond had been in regular course promoted to first lieutenant, he was tendered the *brevet* to that rank on account of "gallant and conspicuous conduct" on this very occasion. This simply amounted to offering him less than he already had. However, Buster is the boy we are all concerned in, and you will well understand that Hammond hadn't forgotten to jog Senator Farwell's elbow, and presently that gentleman woke up in earnest.

"Quit you like men; be strong," was the text Roderick Ross had stood by from his boyhood. "Do your best, no man can do more," were the loving father's words; and by neither boy nor man could it be said by one of us, that though Rod might have failed in mathematics, he had not won in every other way. "I'll win it yet!" he had wired when enlisting, brave fellow that he was,

and win it he did, for presently there came a telegram from Senator Farwell,—"The commission is signed," and one week later every officer and soldier at the fort turned to cheer and congratulate the new lieutenant and to bid good-by to Trooper Ross.



SIGNAL BUTTE.



SIGNAL BUTTE.

CHAPTER I.

The new road from Prescott to the mining settlements along the Santa Anita followed the Sandy for two or three miles above Apache Cañon, then, turning abruptly, dived under the turbid waters and reappeared, dripping and bedraggled, on the opposite bank, where it was speedily lost in the thick underbrush as it wound away eastward. Time was when the trail followed the cañon itself,—a mere mule-path,—but ever since the night of the big cloud-burst that swelled the stream to the force and fury of a Niagara and drowned old Sanchez and his whole party of prospectors, packers, and pack-mules, even the Indians seemed to shun it. The only survivor of the tragedy was a lad of twelve, the son of a Yankee miner and his Mexican wife, a lad whose name was Leon McNutt,—McNutt

being the patronymic and Leon the Christian name given him by his dark-eyed, dark-haired, dark-skinned mother,—and Leon, swept away in the flood, was fished out at dawn several miles below by a squad of troopers from old Fort Retribution. The little fellow was more dead than alive, half drowned, and sadly battered and bruised by the flotsam and jetsam of the wreck whirled along with him by the raging waters, and for a time all effort to revive him failed. When at last he was able to speak and tell his name, he was lying in a dainty little bed in a cool room, with such a gentle, pitying, motherly face bending over him, and such soft hands caressing his heavy crop of coal-black hair, and beside the sweet, womanly face was that of a sturdy Saxon boy of about Leon's own age, whose blue eyes were full of anxiety and sympathetic interest. The first hand-clasp the little orphan seemed to recognize was this other boy's. It was in answer to his questioning that the bewildered patient feebly murmured his name,—Leon McNutt, —and could not at all understand the merriment in the room when his questioner turned with grave, perplexed, incredulous face to the two gentlemen in uniform standing by and wonderingly announced, "He says his name's Layon MacDuff."

And that was how the first boy of our story came to be hailed thereafter by his trooper friends as MacDuff instead of the patronymic to which he

was entitled. Even officers and ladies seemed to find the title more whimsically attractive than the pretty Spanish-Mexican name of Leon, by which Mrs. Cullen, the captain's wife and Randall's mother, always addressed him. One of the soldiers referred to him as the Waif of Apache Cañon, but the big tears that rose to the boy's dark eyes at any reference to the tragedy that left him alone in the world crushed that would-be witticism in the bud. Without adoption, either formal or informal, Leon had become an inmate of Captain Cullen's household from the moment of his arrival in Sergeant Kelly's arms, and there he lived as Randall's friend, fellow-scholar, and playmate for sixteen months, by which time he had forgotten his sorrows, and had transferred to his protectors about all the measure of love and gratitude he had ever felt for his parents.

And then came changes. For nearly a year the boys had roamed together over the neighborhood, hunting and fishing, riding their ponies, living a healthy, active, out-door life, except when at their lessons or asleep, and the bond between them had grown stronger and stronger as the days went by. But old Fort Retribution was one of the relics of the great war of the rebellion, and had been "located" by the volunteers for temporary occupancy only, with the main idea of being near the water. It was on low, sandy, unprofitable ground

in an out-of-the-way corner of Arizona, and was maintained for the sole purpose of the defence of prospectors, settlers, and miners against marauding Apaches. By and by a stage-route was projected from the new mines in the Santa Anita valley to Prescott, and for safety the road wound around the spurs of the Socorro range instead of diving—with the Sandy—through the ten-mile slit of Apache Cañon. Mexicans are superstitious as so many Indians, and Indians as so many sailors, and all manner of ghost stories were told around the camp-fires as a result of that cloud-burst episode of the early '70's. You couldn't bribe a Mexican packer to take a mule-train through there after dark, and the Indians shunned it as they did the Whistling Caves up in the Red Rock country. White men and soldiers didn't care a rap for ghosts, but they didn't wish to take chances on cloud-bursts. The cañon was narrow and tortuous, the rocky walls well-nigh vertical in places, and so it would have cost money and labor to run a wagon road through there. The road was pushed eastward, therefore, from the ford, five miles north of the upper entrance to the cañon, and old Fort Retribution, warned by the cloud-burst of '71 that it would better seek higher ground, was ordered moved from the flats at the southern side of the range over to a plateau several miles to the east, whence there was a splendid view of the Tonto Basin for many a league

towards the distant cliffs of the Black Mesa and away south-eastward to the Sierra Ancha. Under the bluffs of the Socorro were abundant springs of clear, cold water; among the foot-hills was abundant grass for the horses and pack-mules; and, but for its utter isolation, the new post of old Fort Retribution would have been all that could be hoped for in Arizona, and the cavalry officers and men rejoiced in the change.

But it was decided upon at a time when Leon's heart was nearly broken. The regiment to which his kind friend and protector belonged was ordered eastward after several years of exile, and a new and strange command was to take its place. Captain and Mrs. Cullen had done what they could for their foundling. They fed and clothed, taught and cared for him as they did for their own, because "Randy" had been pining for a playmate, and this little fellow came opportunely into his life. They had, furthermore, done all that lay in their power to secure for the orphan such property as might have been his father's; but this proved a difficult task. McNutt had had a partner in his mining ventures, but the partner swore stoutly that Mac hadn't a cent in the world that wasn't swept away in the flood of Apache Cañon,—even went so far as to declare that Mac owed him money,—and more than once appeared at Retribution when times were hard at the mines and thought the officers or some-

body ought to pay it because they now had Mac's boy as security. He generally compromised, as he called it, however, with requests to be supplied with bacon, flour, coffee, and sugar at commissary prices, which were far less than those at the mines. The soldiers found out that this man, Muncey by name, was in bad repute among his fellow-miners, and openly flouted him when he came among them, but the officers, unable to prove anything, continued to show courtesy to even though they disliked him.

Captain Cullen's troop marched away from Retribution in April, '72, just as soon as Captain Raymond's, of the —th Cavalry, arrived. Mrs. Cullen and Randy in the mean time having been sent away by stage to the Colorado, and thence by steamer around to San Francisco. (This was long before railways were known in Arizona.) But weeks before the departure of the troop there arrived at the old post a swarthy little fellow from Tucson, who announced himself as brother of the late Mrs. McNutt and as Leon's uncle. He had come, he said, to take Leon back to his mother's people in Sonora. He brought letters from officials in Tucson which established his claim, and was fortified in his statements by McNutt's former partner, the malodorous Muncey, who came with him. The officers and men had no claims upon the boy other than those of friendship and affection. They were his rescuers and supporters,—

that was all,—but Leon was by this time far more American than Mexican,—"far more Yank than Greaser," as the men expressed it,—and he not only begged and prayed not to be taken from them, he kicked and scratched and fought like a young bear cub when finally forced away. Mrs. Cullen and Randy were spared that scene. She had been ailing a little as a result of too long a stay on the flats of old Retribution, and had been taken up to the mountain perch of Prescott for change of air while the packing for the move was going on, Randall going with his mother,—sorely aggrieved because Leon was not included in the invitation sent by the colonel's wife. Captain Cullen, probably, was party to the arrangement. He knew they could not keep Leon always, and the longer the stay the harder the parting. Less than a week after his friend and playmate had gone his uncle and the partner appeared; less than a fortnight and the poor little fellow was pulled off the buckboard in the dusty streets of Tucson and turned over to a Mexican packer for transportation to Sonora, and less than a month after the Cullens and "C" Troop had left the post, haggard, half starved, footsore, and in rags, little Leon reappeared at old Retribution almost as utter a stranger as when, half drowned, he was borne thither in Sergeant Kelly's arms long eighteen months before.

If you had lived a year or more in a certain village and knew every member of every household within four blocks of your home and were to be taken away for a month or so, and returning, faint, footsore, hungry, and in rags, yet thrilling with hope and joy at the thought of being restored to kind friends and hospitable firesides only to find everything but the houses changed, you can fancy little Leon's dumb misery as he dragged from door to door along officers' row meeting only total strangers. He reached the old post just about two o'clock of a scorching May afternoon,—when everybody was seeking shelter within-doors,—and the servants who came to answer his timid knock looked askance at the little black-eyed ragamuffin and could only say the people he sought were gone. He had turned away with a choking sob from the third door,—the big house where the major of the Eleventh Cavalry used to live,—not knowing whither now to go, and had sunk down upon the steps in utter desolation, when he heard through the screen of the open window a childish voice pleading. "It must be Leon, mamma. Do let me call him back." And the next minute a pretty flaxen-haired girl of ten was at his side. Leon never could tell just how it all came about. He remembered trying hard to keep a stiff upper lip and be brave and self-controlled and tell his story calmly and coherently, but he

was weak, starved, crushed with the bitterness of his disappointment, and he broke down entirely and sobbed in utter abandonment, and there was no more thought of siesta at Captain Foster's quarters that afternoon. A pitying, sympathetic group surrounded the boy, Mrs. Foster and her daughter Nellie vying with one another in ministering to his wants, and other kind women coming in from adjoining quarters as the story swiftly went the rounds. It was all over the post in a few hours how little Leon who used to live here with the Cullens as Randall's playmate and friend had escaped from the packers in Southern Arizona and made his way all those weary, blistering, desert miles, begging a ride in freight wagons, herding mules, trotting along behind the mail buckboard, sometimes tramping all alone, until he reached at last the familiar scenes, only to find that his friends were fled.

No hospitality was ever warmer than that of the soldier in those old frontier days. Tramp or vagabond, gypsy, "Greaser," or Indian, it made no difference; even vagrant dogs never knew what it was to be turned away uncheered. The Fosters took the little stranger for the time being, at least, because they knew the Cullens well and, meeting them in San Francisco, had heard Leon's story from their own lips, though never dreaming they were to see him so soon. They and the other new

families were kind to him as people well could be, and yet, though grateful, it was plain the boy could not be consoled. They were tearing down the frame barracks and in the midst of the move to the new site—some of the troops were already there encamped—when Leon reappeared, and he watched the process of dismantling with a leaden heart. The only real home he had ever known was being ripped to pieces before his very eyes, and he could not bear it. While the new officers and men were strangers to him, there was still at the post his first protector, old Sergeant Kelly, newly appointed ordnance sergeant and retained there after the departure of his old regiment. There was the hospital steward and his family and the clerks and employés about the trader's store, as well as the men at the quartermaster's corral; they knew him well, but they, too, were in the midst of preparation for the move. They were full of sympathy for him and of distrust of Muncey, the ex-partner, and of Manuel Cardoza, the maternal uncle. They believed implicitly Leon's story of his transportation. The boy said that Uncle Manuel had treated him fairly well until they were south of the Gila River. Muncey had left them and gone back to the Santa Anita after signing and exchanging some papers with Manuel at a ranch on the Agua Fria. Leon could tell little about his journey southward. The

driver of the buckboard had made a place for him among the mail-sacks, and there he cried himself to sleep at night. But instead of taking him back to Aunt Carmen, of whom his mother had often told him, Uncle Manuel had turned him over to this boss packer at Tucson, and Leon soon found there was something wrong. Instead of taking the southward trail, the pack-train was travelling eastward day after day, and he learned presently that they were going to old Fort Crittenden,—far over where the Chiricahua Apaches under Cochise, their famous leader, were then in the height of their bloody work. Mrs. Cullen had taught Randall and Leon the beautiful constellations in the cloudless Arizona skies, and from the pole-star by night and the sun by day he knew they were never going towards Hermosillo, his mother's far Sonora home. Then he overheard talk among the packers that boded ill for him. Manuel had reasons for wanting to get him out of the way, was all he could make of it, and if he wasn't lost, as they expressed it, before they reached Sierra Bonita, he must be "lost" there,—where it could be laid to Cochise and the Chiricahuas. Terrified, the boy still kept his wits. They passed a wagon-train—a quartermaster's "outfit" westward bound —one day, and that evening, soon after dark, he slipped out of camp, and all alone and afoot took the back track across the desert, and after an all-

night tramp caught the train with its soldier escort just as it was starting on the next stage. The troopers gave him food and a place to sleep under the canvas cover of one of the wagons. Leon was carried back to Tucson safely, but from there home to the old post far up to the north was a matter of days and weeks. He had got there at last worn and weary, but something told him it wouldn't be long before Uncle Manuel and Muncey were after him again, speedily learning that he had returned to his friends instead of being "lost," as the packers might say, among their foes, the Chiricahuas. He warned his soldier friends, old and new, that he would not and dare not return to his uncle's control. The problem therefore was what to do with him until Captain and Mrs. Cullen could be heard from, and the solution came quicker than might have been expected. Senior captain of his regiment when it left Arizona, Captain Cullen was looking forward to promotion to the grade of major within the year, and probably in his own old regiment. But one of those sudden and unlooked-for opportunities occurred that are so characteristic of army life. Major Wharton, of the —th Cavalry, the new regiment just reaching Arizona, concluded that he would rather retire with the three-quarters pay of that grade after thirty years of hard service than go out to the desert and desolate land of Arizona for four years

more. Captain Cullen, promoted major of the —th Cavalry *vice* Wharton retired, was ordered to return to the very station he had so recently quit. Leon's best friends were coming back, and Randy wrote in eager delight to tell the news.

This was about mid-June. Blazing hot and dry were the days and breezeless the nights,—a most unfavorable time for travel to and fro across the Arizona deserts,—but Major Cullen was losing not an hour. He was a man who had seen much service among the Apache Indians, knew their haunts and habits, and was both feared and trusted by them. No sooner was the old regiment fairly out of Arizona and before the new one was fairly in, there flew a hurried despatch to San Francisco that was flashed on across the Sierras and Rockies and caught the new major at Omaha. In brief words it told him that there was universal uprising among the Apaches, and asked how soon he could return, as the general held open for him an important command. In twenty-four hours the reply was at Prescott: "Start this morning. Expect me by 25th." On the same day a courier from Prescott—riding post-haste with despatches to the new commander at Retribution—warned him that he must guard his working parties and the road between the old and new posts. The Tontos had "jumped." Now, Tonto in the Mexican dialect means fool or idiot, but the Tonto

Apache was no fool. The craftiest, cunningest of Indians he, and well had the chiefs and young men reasoned that a good time to strike would be just as the old seasoned regiment left the territory and before the new one—utterly untutored in Apache stratagem and mountain scouting—could begin to get down to their work. And so all through the wild hunting-grounds in the Sierras their war-fires and signals blazed by night and puffed in smoke-cloud by day. All across the rocky chasms and among the pine-crested ranges, from the haunts of the Hualpais in Northern Arizona down through the valleys of the Verde and the Hassayampa,—the home of Apache Mohave and Apache Yuma,—across the broad basin between the Mazatzal and the Black Mesa, and southward to the Sierra Ancha, the Tonto Apaches had sent their messengers urging instant and united action; and down from the mountains, on stage-road, trail, and scattered mining camp, swooped the savage foemen, and all Arizona waked to a new reign of terror.

Among the first mines abandoned as the result of this sudden raid were those on the Santa Anita. The first refugee to claim the protection of the commander of new Fort Retribution was Muncey, speedily followed by half a dozen others, all with fearful tales of massacre and pillage. It was a hot June evening when they gathered at the edge

of the bluff looking westward from the adjutant's office over the southern foot-hills of the range to where, faint and dim, the guard-lights of the old post could just be distinguished through the rare Arizona atmosphere, twinkling feebly in the low lands of the Sandy, ten long miles away. "How many of our people are left down there under care of the guard?" asked Captain Raymond of the stern-faced old soldier in command.

"Only the ordnance sergeant's family and the workmen dismantling what's left of the post."

"No women or children besides Kelly's?"

"None. The last were moved over to-day,—unless we count MacDuff. Leon said he wanted to stay with old Kelly to the last."

"Leon!" exclaimed the miner Muncey, in apparent amaze. "Why, I thought that boy was—was safe in Sonora with his mother's people." Whereat two of his fellow-miners looked keenly into his face and then exchanged quick and expressive glances.

"That boy," said Captain Foster, "is like a cat. He found his way back from Tucson to the old post, and sticks to it so long as there's a shingle left. Look there," he continued, pointing to a jagged, conical height clearly defined against the soft hues of the lingering twilight. "Yonder's Signal Butte* overhanging the old rookeries, and

* "Butte" is universally pronounced "bute."

Kelly's ranch is a mile beyond that. Now, suppose the Apaches did work around to the west of us and were to swoop down on the Sandy; suppose our people were able to get up there and signal; how long would it take us to turn out fifty horsemen and gallop over those ten miles, and how much would be left by the time we got there?"

The commanding officer stood in deep thought a moment without replying. He had sent to the old site only a lieutenant and twenty men. This would be sufficient to protect the property still unshipped and the lives of those still detained there on duty, but there were two ranches in the valley within a couple of miles of the post; there was the camp of José's bull-train; there was Sergeant Kelly's little farm on the slopes at the south gate of Apache Cañon,—all beyond rifle-shot of the guard. Kelly was an old First Dragoon man,—a veteran who had fought Apaches quarter of a century before, and declared that he despised them. His wife and two daughters lived at the ranch and, though bitterly disappointed at the removal of the post, were by no means afraid. But no such outbreak as this had occurred before. The Apaches were more daring and better armed, and down in the bottom of his heart Major Thornton wished he had left a bigger force of cavalry at the post; but it was now too late.

Darkness had settled down on the garrison. The last hues of the twilight faded out of the western sky. The guard-lights at the distant valley twinkled faintly but steadfast through the warm, pulseless air. Over at the half-finished quarters the drums and fifes of the infantry were sounding tattoo, and still the party lingered at the westward bluff,—Wharton, Raymond, and Foster chatting in low tone apart, the civilians talking to some younger officers, eagerly and excitedly recounting the circumstances of their morning's flight. Muncey was of these the most voluble. He was just saying, "I tell you the whole Tonto tribe is out of the hills and down here in the basin this very night," when another cried, "Hush!"

Somewhere over on the north side the call of a sentry rang out sharp, clear, and full upon the night air.

"Corporal of the guard, Number 5!"

"That's old Hennicke," said Raymond, promptly. "When he has anything to report it's no boy-story. I'll go, sir."

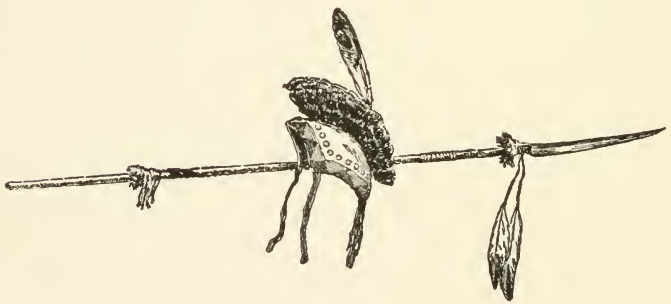
The cry went echoing back towards the guard-house, sharply passed along by Numbers 6 and 7 on the eastern flank. The corporal came out on the run, and the guardsmen, sitting or sprawling around the stacked rifles, scrambled, many of them, to their feet. Before even a fleet corporal could

reach the distant post Thornton and two captains bore down upon it, others at respectful distance following.

"What's up, Hennicke?" hailed his troop commander, scorning preliminaries.

"Firing, sir. Out on the Prescott road to the north-west. I could see the flashes."

"Who on earth can it be?" asked the major. "Captain Foster, let your troop saddle at once."



CHAPTER II.

That there should be repeated alarms from the north-east, east, and south, where away were the pine-covered crests of the Black Mesa and the Sierra Ancha, where were the haunts of the Tonto and the White Mountain Apaches, every one expected. There were still among the foot-hills some parties of miners and prospectors, over whose fate there was good reason for alarm. The Santa Anita placers had been promptly abandoned, as we have seen. There was eager watch for danger signals from the site of old Retribution down in the Sandy Valley to the west, but from the site of the new post to the crossing of the Sandy above Apache Cañon the road turned and twisted among the foot-hills of the mountains for twenty-three miles, and there wasn't a human habitation for nearly forty. Then, deep in a cleft of the range, a stage station, with corrals and well and lunch-room and bar, had

been built by some daring spirits, eager to accumulate money at whatever risk. Beyond them, for another thirty miles, the road lay through desolation itself, and reached the outskirts of even frontier civilization again among the newly finished ranches in the broad and sunny valley of Willow Creek.

In view of the sudden and simultaneous swoop of the Apaches upon the roads east of Prescott, everybody had been warned. Even the mail-riders held back for mounted escorts. No stage for Wickenberg and the south, no buckboard for the Santa Anita, had left the territorial capital for three days. No mail had been received at Retribution for forty-eight hours. The daring troopers who rode in with despatches early that June morning had come through the Sandy Valley, as they frankly admitted, with revolvers in hand, their hearts in their mouths, and the reins in their teeth. They had passed no party eastward bound. Who, then, could it be who, striving now to reach the post by way of the new road, should have fallen foul of the Apaches only a mile or so out? Thornton's first impulse was to say the sentry must be dreaming; but Raymond, who had known the old trooper nearly a decade, as promptly declared the sentry's report reliable. "I not only saw the flashes," said Hennicke, "but I could faintly hear the shots, sir,—fifteen or twenty. It was still as death out here."

Meantime, sending an eager boy lieutenant on the jump to order out "G" Troop, Captain Foster had hastened to his temporary quarters—half canvas, half adobe—to make his hurried preparations. Already the rumor was running from mouth to mouth. Only three of the officers had their families with them at the time. Mrs. Foster was one of those women who insisted on accompanying her husband on the move to Arizona, even though the rudest of camp life was to be her portion, and she and Nellie, with anxiously beating hearts, were standing on the unfinished porch of the new quarters, listening for further sound, as the captain hastened up the slope.

"It can't be anything very serious, dear," he said, reassuringly. "Probably some belated miners whose mules the Indians are trying to run off. We'll know in half an hour, and I'll send word in at once." Silent and anxious, she followed within the door-way, where hung a Navajo blanket as the only barrier between their army nest and the warm outer air, Nellie clinging to her mother's side.

"We've been watching all evening for signals from the Butte," murmured Mrs. Foster, as the captain rapidly exchanged his regulation coat for a scouting jacket. "We were so anxious about Leon, and everybody who had to remain there seems so exposed now. We never thought of hearing of trouble thereaway," and Mrs. Foster glanced

out through the open casement to where the Prescott road, winding away down the slope, disappeared among the dark mountain shapes lying black and silent under the twinkling pointers of the Great Bear.

"Leon is safe enough if he'll only stay where he is, with Kelly," answered the captain, buckling on his pistol-belt. "Apaches won't attack the post—even the remains of one—at night. But I wish old Kelly and his girls were nearer the guard. I don't like their being so far from help and so close to those overhanging cliffs. Now, don't borrow trouble to-night, dear," he concluded, taking his devoted wife in his arms and kissing away the burning tears. "You and Nell must be brave. These beggarly Apaches probably think we won't know how to fight them, and are simply starting in for a little fun. I'm only too glad of a chance to deal them a lesson,—so is 'G' Troop."

Ten minutes later, in perfect silence, a double file of horsemen rode briskly away into the darkness to the north, Foster leading,—every trooper armed with carbine and revolver. The night was breathless. Not a puff of breeze stirred the pines along the mountain-side or ruffled the foliage of the willows at the Springs. For two miles the road lay through open country, dipping from the plateau on which stood the new post into a mile-wide depression, then winding up the gradual

ascent among the foot-hills of the range. Somewhere along that ascent the firing had been seen and heard. Hennicke's story had already been corroborated. Two quartermaster's men, enjoying a quiet smoke outside the adobe walls of the new corral, had seen and heard just what he did, and Major Thornton was already in possession of their story. So, too, had the sentry on Number 4 heard what sounded like distant shots, but had seen nothing. Now, as Foster and his fifty horsemen disappeared in the night, the major stood at the edge of the bluff looking out to the north with an eager group around him,—Captains Raymond and Turner, whose companies had silently assembled under arms and were waiting for orders within the quadrangle of the garrison, and here were the adjutant and quartermaster and a lieutenant or two. There was little talking going on,—all were listening intently for sounds from the north or sight of further firing. One or two of the Santa Anita prospectors had mounted and gone out after Foster, but the mass of the refugees still clustered along the bluff, chatting in low, eager tones. If any one voice was especially prominent it was Muncey's, and like most men given to chatter he found only an impatient audience. "I tell you," said he for the third time, "there can't be less than a hundred of them Tontos out there now. They just want a single troop or even two

to come and tackle 'em in the dark," and now he had raised his voice still higher and was talking for the benefit of the major, who had been persistent in avoiding him and had twice pointedly begged him not to intrude upon the council of the officers. "They've just lined the rocks and the roadside out there, and are simply laying for a chance to ambush the whole crowd. What *I'd* 'a' done would be to send two hundred men out deployed as skirmishers and swept the hull bottom, —north and west too."

These remarks were rewarded by his companions with a contemptuous sniff, or a nervous, half-jeering titter. "You ought to have been a general, Muncey,—that's what's the matter with you. There ain't Apaches enough in all Arizona to dare a fight in the open—day or night—with fifty white men, soldiers or cits. No Apache plans a fight that's going to get him liable to be shot. The kind of fighting he likes is from behind rocks and trees, and there ain't rocks and trees enough out there to cover a dozen of 'em. I'm betting the firing was done by some party as badly scared as you were yis'day morning. I'm betting they just thought some skulking lynx was an Apache and let drive a volley into the dark. The sentry says the shots were all bunched. You know and I know the Apaches don't own a breech-loader" (this was early in the '70's), "so most of it must

have been done by white men or 'Greasers' like that gang you trained with last year, instead of herding with your own kind."

Evidently this allusion was a stinger. There was a burst of laughter, more or less jeering and unsympathetic, under shower of which Muncey turned angrily away. He went over towards the group of officers, but at sight of him the major lifted a warning hand and lowered his voice. "Here's that fellow Muncey again," said he, "and I distrust him somehow." Everybody seemed to turn an unsociable back on the new-comer, and presently, after a moment's hesitation, he pulled his old felt hat lower over his eyes, thrust his hands in his pockets, and slouched away down the slope in the direction of the corral, within whose adobe walls the horses and mules of the refugees were sheltered.

And now came on a night of no little excitement even for Arizona in the heart of the Apache country. Full three-quarters of an hour after Foster and his men rode away there were strange silence and eager waiting at the post. Taps had sounded just before they left. Half-past ten o'clock, called by the sentries, had gone echoing away across the still and starlit mesa and not a sound or sign came from the front. Then suddenly far out through the darkness there was faintly audible the thud of hoofs, and a minute or

so brought the rider—full canter—into their midst. He could barely rein in his horse at the hail of the major's party. Everybody—officers, civilians, and even soldiers—seem to swarm about the courier in an instant. It was Corporal Foley of Foster's troop. Recognizing the major, he threw himself from the saddle and stood respectfully before the commander, handing him a pencilled note, which the major eagerly opened and read, all eyes upon him.

"We found two Mexicans," it said, "with a camp outfit. They were badly frightened, but unhurt. They declare they were attacked by Apaches, who succeeded in running off two mules. They say the Indians drew away north-west towards the Sandy, and that there was a party of prospectors and packers camped at Raton Springs, eight miles out, who were warned of the outbreak, but who wouldn't believe it. The Mexicans said they were trying to reach the post when headed off, and that there were enough Apaches to wipe out that party. They themselves only escaped by hiding among the rocks down in the deep ravine. Their story is told with such earnestness that I have deemed it best to push on in search of the prospectors referred to. We should reach the Springs soon after midnight. The Mexicans go with us in hopes of recovering their mules.

(Signed) "FOSTER,
"Commanding troop."

"Come with me, gentlemen," said the major, after a moment's thought. "This is something I'll have to talk over with you. No," he continued, as many of the frontiersmen, too, showed evident inclination to consider themselves included in the invitation. "Excuse me now if I have to talk with my officers a moment. There is no news, except that Captain Foster has found a couple of Mexicans who claim to have been jumped by Apaches, and who say the Indians have gone to attack a small camp of prospectors at Raton Springs. Do you know any miners or prospectors who could be there?"

A general shaking of heads followed. No one knew. One or two went so far as to say they didn't believe it. "What sort of looking fellows were the Mexicans, corporal?" asked Ferguson, the brainiest, apparently, of the civilians.

"Oh, insignificant little runts, both of them," said Foley. "One of them spoke English enough to make himself understood, the other could only jabber some lingo I didn't know no more of than I do of Mexican. So far as I could make out they had all been travelling together, but when the bigger part of the crowd stopped to camp at the Springs these two fellows came ahead,—said they were afraid to stay there after what they had heard of the outbreak."

"Well, where did they hear and how?" asked Ferguson.

"They said that they met some of the couriers from Prescott and some prospectors who were driven back from the Clear Creek country—who were skipping for the settlements. They told the couriers that they were going in, but despite that they came on down to the Springs."

"Queer!" said Ferguson, reflectively. "The only Mexicans in the Santa Anita country were those half-dozen that Muncey was mixed up with, —Manuel's lot,—and a scrubby lot they were; but they went off to Tucson over two months ago, seems to me."

"What, the same Manuel that said he was brother-in-law to MacNutt,—Muncey's partner?"

"The same. I heard he took Mac's boy back to Sonora with him, and that the kid didn't want to go at all."

"Indeed he didn't!" answered Foley, stoutly, "for he's worked his way back to the old post inside of a month. He's down there now with the ordnance sergeant."

"Yes, and Muncey was pretending to be surprised when he heard of it to-night; and there was two letters came to him from Tucson last week that prob'ly told him all about it, though I don't suppose Manuel could write. Where'd Muncey go to, anyhow?" broke off Ferguson, suddenly. "I reckon he knows where those fellows are if anybody does."

"Gone to get a bracer," laughed one of the miners. "Muncey's nerve ain't what it used to be, and he's rattled to-night. He's been shaky ever since that cloud-burst swept his partner into eternity two years ago. I never understood what drew them together; Mac was a square man and a hard worker, and, what's more, everything they had in the way of an outfit was bought with his money,—wagons, mules, burros, grub, tent, and tools,—it was all Mac's, and he had some coin and gold-dust besides. Yet, when Captain Cullen tried to get hold of it for the boy, nothing could be found that Muncey hadn't a lien on,—him and that damn little 'Greaser' brother-in-law of Mac's, —what's his name?—Manuel Cardoza."

"Cardoza?" exclaimed Corporal Foley. "Manuel Cardoza? Why, that's the name of the boss of this party up near Raton Springs where 'G' Troop's gone,—I heard it given to Captain Foster twice."

Ferguson turned quickly around. He had been standing facing the north, keeping intent watch in the direction taken by the troopers. Now he whirled on the corporal. "Are you sure of that?" he said. "By the great jumping Jehosaphat! that means something I hadn't thought of. Muncey swore to me that they had gone to Sonora and wouldn't return till October, but the boy got away and came back. And he's over there at the old post now—to-night?"

"That's just where he is, or was yes'day morning," said Foley. "We haven't heard from them since."

"And Manuel Cardoza had a pack of Mexicans at Raton Springs at sunset, did he? and wouldn't run for shelter here even when he knew the whole Tonto tribe was on the war-path?" He turned again northward and gazed out over the intervening silence and space to where the huge bulk of the Socorro loomed up against the polar sky. Cassiopeia's Chair, traced by clear, twinkling stars, was resting along the black backbone of the range. "The old Tonto trail, from the Springs to the foot of Apache Cañon, burrows right through those hills," said he. "The Springs lie not more'n six miles to the left around that point. The miserable 'Greasers' didn't dare go through Apache Cañon, and they didn't want to be seen over here. I'll bet what you like they're bound for the old post—and another attempt to nab Leon. Now, boys, I want just a minute's talk with two men,—one of 'em, Major Thornton; the other's Muncey."

Major Thornton was found in less than a minute, but not so Muncey. When midnight came it was definitely settled that Muncey was gone; so was Ferguson's pet roan, the fleetest horse of the Santa Anita mines.

CHAPTER III.

The summer night was still young. The sentries had passed the call of "Twelve o'clock and all's well," despite the fact that Trooper Casey, on post at the corral, felt vaguely assured that all wasn't well, with him, at least. "My orders are to take charge of this post and all government property in view," he had begun when questioned by the officer of the day, and as Ferguson's horse wasn't government property, he might have wriggled out of his predicament under that head were there not other clauses in his orders which he knew as well as did the officer of the day. One of these read, "Allow no horse to be taken out of the corral between tattoo and reveille except in presence of a commissioned officer, the quartermaster-sergeant, or the corporal of the guard;" and as Ferguson's horse could neither have climbed nor jumped a nine-foot-high adobe wall, the conclusion was irresistible that he had been led or ridden out through the gate-way, and it was the sentry's business to see and stop him. There were still

other orders bearing on the case. The man Muncey must have crossed the sentry's post both when he entered and when he left the corral, and the sentry's orders forbade his allowing any person to pass without the countersign,—the password for the night,—with which only certain few of the officers and the guard were intrusted. The post commander had permitted the prospectors to turn their horses and mules into the big new corral, a privilege of which they had eagerly availed themselves, but the quartermaster-sergeant and his men, who slept ordinarily in a tent pitched just within the gate-way, had not slept at all this night, but, in common with those members of the garrison who were not actually in ranks awaiting orders, were out somewhere along that northward bluff, watching eagerly for further sign from the front. The plain truth of the matter was that Casey, too, instead of watching the corral, kept as much as possible at the northward end of his post where he could see or hear what might be going on in that quarter. And so had it happened that the corral was left practically unguarded, and Muncey had been enabled to enter and quit at his own sweet will.

It wouldn't help Casey to say he didn't see or didn't hear: school-boy excuses are not accepted in the army. A sentry must see and must hear even in nights as dark as Erebus and blustering

as a boiler-shop, which this summer night was not. On the contrary, it was soft and still and starlit. There was no moon, but the sky was cloudless, and had Casey used even ordinary vigilance, no one without his knowledge could have trespassed on his guarded land. At 12.30, when the third relief came around, Private Meisner took Casey's post, and the latter was in no sense surprised, though wofully disturbed, to find that the moment the old relief was inspected and dismissed at the guard-house the sergeant of the guard had ordered his belts taken off,—and that is the soldier way of saying that the ex-sentry was to be relieved as untrustworthy,—his arms and equipments turned over to his first sergeant, and he himself turned over to the charge of his fellow-members of the guard,—a prisoner awaiting trial by court-martial for neglect of duty. Everybody felt sorry for Casey, who had lost a good reputation, but sorrier for Ferguson, who had lost what was considered of even greater worth in the old frontier days,—a fine horse. Even as Casey was ruefully slipping out of his carbine-sling and waist-belt, Ferguson and others, with lanterns, were tracing the hoof-prints of the beautiful roan. Out from the corral gate, around by the south wall they followed them in the soft, dusty soil, but they were soon lost along the slope. No one believed for a moment that Muncey had ridden eastward

any distance, however. That was the quarter from which the Apaches had come. Westward along the south face of the Socorro was his probable course, for if Cardoza had slipped through from the Springs towards the old post, as now seemed possible, they could meet at the fords of the Sandy not a mile from where the dim lights were twinkling there at old Retribution earlier in the evening, not half a mile from the base of Signal Butte, and barely short rifle-shot from old Sergeant Kelly's ranch.

And now the question arose, where were the Apaches? The miners and prospectors who had fled from the Santa Anita said they fairly swarmed in that valley, fifty miles to the east. The despatches from department head-quarters represented them as having already, at three different points, swooped down upon the Prescott road both east and west of the Sandy; but so far as heard from they had not ventured into the valley south of the Socorro Range,—a cluster of rough, rocky, pine-crested upheavals that bulged out eastward from the main range, jutting like some huge promontory into the Tonto Basin. It was through a rift in this clump from the Raton Springs to the site of old Retribution that the Tonto trail of past generations ran, and through another, still farther to the west, a deep jagged fissure in the bed-rock, that the Sandy foamed and chafed and tore,—the

ill-favored Apache Cañon. Fifty miles north of the Socorro, on the banks of the same stream and in the very heart of the Apache country, was a military post somewhat larger than Retribution,—old Camp Sandy,—and there were stationed the head-quarters and four strong troops of the new regiment that had replaced the Eleventh Cavalry, all commanded by Colonel Pelham. Thornton, at Retribution, felt well assured that by this time Pelham would be pushing out his scouting parties after the Tonto raiders and that between Sandy and Retribution they could make it very lively for the Indians in a day or two, but meantime, should they work around into the Sandy valley, south of the old post, just as Captain Raymond said,—"Heaven help the scattered settlers there!"

"If they reach the lower Sandy by night or day," were the major's orders to Lieutenant Crane, who commanded the guard at the old site, "don't wait an instant. Fire the beacon on Signal Butte."

And now one o'clock of the hot June night had come. There had been skirmishing to the north,—a chase to the north-west,—signal-fires ablaze to the east, across the broad basin. Couriers had been pushed out north-westward after Foster with news of Muncey's bolt and information as to the Cardoza party. Ferguson and two friends—daring fellows, well armed and mounted—had just left

the post determined to ride westward in the hopes of overhauling Muncey and—well,—hanging was the horse-thief's penalty in those days. The troops of the garrison—arms and equipments close at hand—were sprawled about the verandas of the new quarters, eager for the order to saddle, and the major had just despatched a messenger to say to the captain that the men might as well turn in for the night, when once again there came the clear and ringing summons for the corporal of the guard,—this time from the westward bluff. Those who happened to be nearest that side of the garrison had already, before the cry, heard the sharp, stern challenge, "Who comes there?"

Even before the major's little party could reach the north side, the trim figure of Corporal Lynch came bounding back up the slope. "What was the matter, corporal?" hailed the post commander, and Lynch, halting short, brought his carbine to the carry and his gloved left hand to the salute, replying with soldierly brevity,—

"It's MacDuff, sir."

"MacDuff? You mean little Leon?"

"Yes, sir,—with a note for the doctor. He stopped to water Sergeant Kelly's broncho at the Springs."

Another minute and riding briskly up from the dark low ground to the west of the mesa came the lithe, swarthy young courier himself. He reined

in the instant he heard the major's voice and threw himself from saddle.

"What on earth brought you here at this time, Leon?"

"Mrs. Downey, sir, was very sick. The folks from Downey's ranch all came up to the post at dark,—said they didn't dare stay,—the Apaches were surely in the valley, and they got word somehow they were everywhere along the north face of the Socorro, and Sergeant Kelly sent the girls in to the post from his ranch, but Mrs. Kelly wouldn't leave him. She stayed there. There's really no place around the old post for women to stay, but they've got them into a tent for the night. They daren't remain at the farm-house up by the cañon, and the lieutenant couldn't detach any men as guard,—he needs them all at the post, where the stores are still in the magazine. Mrs. Downey was in such pain that we were all worried about her, so I borrowed the pony without saying anything to Sergeant Kelly and came up to get some medicine."

"Well. Great Scott! boy, that's taking tall chances," said the major. "Didn't you see or hear anybody?"

"A fellow passed me riding like mad about five or six miles out, sir. I heard him coming and slipped off the road a few yards, not knowing who it might be, and then just a few minutes ago I was

halted by three cits,—said they were looking for a horse-thief, but I wasn't the one they were in search of."

Meantime, the doctor had taken Downey's note and was trying by the light of the guard lantern to decipher the ill-written scrawl. "She has had the same trouble before," said he, "and I can give her the medicine she needs, Leon, but you oughtn't to risk going back to-night."

"Oh, I've simply got to go, doctor," said the boy, eagerly. "Mrs. Downey has always been mighty kind to Randy and me. She always gave us lunch at her ranch when we were down there fishing, and I told her I'd fetch the medicine before daybreak or get nabbed trying. Why, the Indians themselves don't know the country around here better than Randy and I do, though I've never been out this far at night."

The major, too, interposed an objection. "I feel that we are responsible for you, Leon, until Major Cullen gets back and claims you. It isn't Apaches only to be avoided. They tell me your Uncle Manuel is here again, and the man you met riding full tilt was your father's old partner, Muncey,—going to meet Manuel, I judge, somewhere on the old Tonto trail through the Socorro.

Then, indeed, Leon looked very grave. "I'm more afraid of them than I am of Apaches," he said. "They don't mean to take me back to

mother's people. I shouldn't want to go if they did. I'm a Yankee like father, and I want to stay here and grow up in the cavalry. Randy and I are going to enlist just as soon as we're eighteen. But all the same I promised Mrs. Downey she should have that medicine before day, and I'm going."

And so, seeing how earnest the boy was and recognizing from his description that Mrs. Downey must be in great pain, the major reluctantly assented. "I'd send a couple of men back with you, lad, but 'tisn't likely the Indians are anywhere along the road between two parties of troops, —I don't think they'd risk that. At all events, we'd probably have known it before if they were. We are all up here yet, waiting further news from Captain Foster. Mrs. Foster is out there on her piazza now, so you might see her while you're waiting. Then come over to my house and have some coffee before you start."

It was just 1.30 by the guard-house clock when once again the young courier mounted his wiry pony and started for the ten-mile ride back. He went loping away down the starlit slope, the phial wrapped in his saddle-bag, after a hurried good-by, his black eyes gleaming, his white teeth firmly set.

"Good grit,—that boy," said the major, looking after him. "I wouldn't mind having him for my own."

"Good grit, indeed," said Raymond. "Most boys I know would rather do anything than risk that ride in the dark in the midst of an Indian scare. What time ought he to get there?"

"Well, his pony's fresh and speedy,—by 3 or 3.15 at latest. Now it's time to hear from Foster."

They were walking slowly back to the porch of his unfinished quarters as they talked,—he, his adjutant, and his especial friend, Captain Raymond. Quiet had settled down on the post. Wearied with watching, almost everybody had gone to get such sleep as was possible, but the guard and a few officers still remained wide awake. Mrs. Foster, unable to control her anxiety, was still restlessly pacing the veranda or rocking in her big chair, and the officer of the day, returning from a tour of the sentry posts, was standing on the walk and saying some reassuring words when the post commander and his party came along.

"I feel dreadfully nervous about that boy, major," said she. "Of course it was all very brave of him to take such a risk for Mrs. Downey's sake, but when Indians have dared to come within a mile of us, what's to prevent their being all along that westward road now? Couldn't you have sent a few men?"

"Could, perhaps," said the major, with an air that betrayed just a little how much he resented it that any of the ladies should question his

judgment, "but there are two reasons why I didn't, —more than two, in fact. In the first place, the boy had just come safely in over the road, and that shows that it is probably safe for to-night at least. Even Apaches have to sleep sometimes, you know. In the second place, Captain Foster has driven ahead of him any Indians that might have been out here to the north,—if, indeed, those Mexicans weren't shooting at spooks. We have only their word for it, you know, that there were any Tontos at all."

"They ran off two mules," interposed Mrs. Foster, impetuously.

"Wait a moment. The Mexicans say they did, but I've known these 'Greasers' to lie like Ananias already, and we've only been here a few weeks. Even if they had had two mules and a boy, what was to prevent the mules stampeding into the hills on their own account, and hiding in some ravine to the west of the road as their owners did to the east?"

"But Captain Foster wouldn't chase spooks all night," said the lady, rocking rapidly and excitedly now. She was full of conviction that the Apaches were all around them, and there was no comfort in being argued out of the idea.

"Captain Foster," replied the major, "knows as well as we do from official reports that the Indians have raided the mines and the Prescott road, and

he has gone on,—like the good soldier he is," added he, diplomatically, "to warn or rescue these other parties, if they really exist, and stir up the Indians if they get in his way. South of that curtain of mountains," he continued, pointing to the black mass of the Socorro, "and behind your husband's skirmish line, we are free from danger. West of this post, which guards the descent to the Sandy valley, no Indian is going to be fool enough to venture unless he's doubly Tonto, which I'm told means mad. Now, my advice to the wife of my good friend Captain Foster is that she go to bed and sleep. That's what I mean to do."

"But, major," persisted Mrs. Foster, "suppose Leon should be cut off by—by anybody. He told me you said his Mexican uncle was again here trying to capture him. Suppose he shouldn't reach the old post by three o'clock or later,—how would you know?"

"Ah, I thought of all that. I told him to start a fire under what's left of that old stack of condemned hay the moment he got in. The sentries out here on three and four have already received orders to watch for a fire at the old post. If they don't see it by 3.30 at the latest we'll start a party in search. But that fire'll be there all right. Goodnight, Mrs. Foster. Now, don't worry."

But Mrs. Foster did worry. She worried about Leon, exposed as she believed to danger from

two sources. She worried about her husband, even though her native common sense told her it was not likely so strong a command as his company would meet with Apaches that night. If Apaches were in the neighborhood they would be apt to keep well out of the way. She worried so that even by two o'clock when she retired to her own room she could not sleep.

But she worried even less than her friend the major, who found himself too uneasy to lie down at all. Bidding good-night to the three officers, he had gone to his quarters, and as he took a final look out over the silent and shadowy parade, thanked goodness Mrs. Thornton and the children were safe in the East. Not that they would have been in any particular danger at Retribution, but because they'd be in the way just now, and women and children will ask questions that are hard to answer, especially of a post commander. "Confound the Apaches and Muncey and Manuel Cardoza!" said he; "and especially Mrs. Downey. What on earth did she get sick for and have that boy risking his young life to fetch her a camphor julep at three o'clock in the morning?" He wished he had sent a sergeant and ten men back with him. If Apaches really were in the Sandy valley, Crane would need reinforcements anyhow,—only he hated to "rout out" men and horses in that heathenish way long after midnight. If anything should go

wrong with Leon, how his old friend Cullen would blame him! He looked at his watch. Only a little after two. A whole hour to wait before he could hear of the boy's safe return, but surely something should be heard from Foster. It couldn't take his couriers two hours to ride back in the night from Raton Springs.

Lighting his pipe, the major once more went out into the still night air. Over at the guard-house the lights burned dimly, and he could see the shadowy form of the sentry on No. 1 slowly pacing his post. Stepping out upon the parade, he noted that only in one or two of the windows were the night-lights still burning. Earlier in the night signal-fires could be seen far over to the south-east in the Sierra Ancha, but they had dwindled away. Everything about the garrison seemed to speak of calm and security, yet along the porticos of the opposite barracks, and in their bunks within, a hundred stalwart men lay drowsing, with their arms close at hand. Many of them had not even kicked off their boots. "Number One. Half-past two o'clock," rang the call of the sentry at the guard-house. Then Number Two took it up over at the south-west, adding in cheery, resonant tone, "A-a-ll's we-ll." Number Three, far out on the west front,—one of the sentries warned to watch for Leon's signal,—came next, and he, too, piped his soldier lay prompt and clear and

confident. Then came Number Four, at the northwest,—he who had the best view of the distant valley of the Sandy and the bold outlines of Signal Butte,—a big, burly German, he, and his deep bass voice rolled out like the bellow of a bull, "Holluf bahst doo o'glock, unt a-a-wl's vell." Over at the guard-house the men of the first relief were already turning out preparatory to being inspected and marched off to relieve the members of the third, who had gone on at 12.30, and as big Stromberg's resonant bellow went echoing away to the Socorro, there was audible titter and laughing imitation of his German accent, and then sternly the sergeant's voice ordered, "Shut up there! Stop that noise!"

The call had stopped short with Number Four. Not a sound had come from Number Five. "Who's Number Five on your relief?" asked the sergeant, sharply.

"Ruckel; the new man," replied the corporal, already picking up his carbine, but listening intently.

"Ruckel's a snoozer," laughed the boy trumpeter, nervously.

"Silence, you! Quick, corporal!" said the sergeant. "The man couldn't sleep through that Dutchman's yell."

Promptly the corporal went bounding across the parade, the short-cut to the north side, and

Major Thornton—some strange fear hammering at his heart—fast as he could walk had hurried around to the back of his quarters where once more he could see the polar constellations shimmering over the Socorro, and the dim, vague, shadowy lowland stretching away from the slope at his very feet. Already big Stromberg had begun to repeat his call, in Teutonic observance of the order that if the next sentry failed to pass it, it should be repeated once so as to be sure that it was heard. Already Number Six, far around at the corral, had lifted up a shout for the corporal, convinced that something must be wrong with Five. But the corporal was in rapid rush for the scene. He never pulled up as he passed the major, but hastened on down the bluff. Thornton paused at the brink.

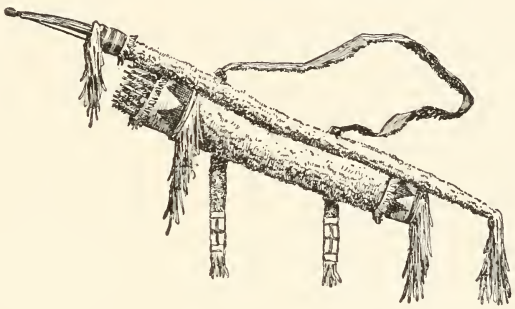
"Where are you, Five? What's the matter?" he heard the corporal's eager hail in the darkness. No answer.

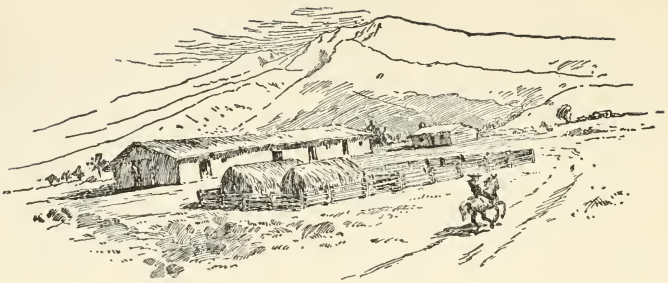
"Where are you, Ruckel? Wh——" Then a stumble, a stifled exclamation, the sound of something like a carbine falling on the sandy ground, and then along the bluff—trot—trot—trot—trot—double time—the rapid coming of the sergeant with the patrol and a lantern.

"This way, sergeant!" cried the major, as he led on down the slope.

"Come here with that light, for God's sake!"

rang the voice of the corporal. And fifty yards farther they found him bending over an inanimate and bleeding form,—that of Ruckel, the young Bavarian trooper, pierced through and through with Tonto arrows.





CHAPTER IV.

Alive, alert, and well at two o'clock, the young sentry on Number Five had passed the call. Entitled to his relief immediately after 2.30, and allowed a few hours' rest and sleep at the guard-house, he had but half an hour now to tramp up and down, up and down, along that dark and dreary post, with the black silhouette of the officers' quarters rising between him and the southern sky, with the black shadows of the northward foot-hills hemming the view of the Prescott road. Soft and sandy was the soil in this depression, with stunted shrubbery and hardy brushwood dotting it here and there. West of the road by which "G" Troop had trotted away the ground lay open and clear. East of it and over towards the upper end of Six's post there remained many clumps of wild vegetation, and if any doubt existed at two o'clock of the near

presence of Apaches in force they were banished at 2.30, for "C" Troop, tumbling out in hot haste and formed in fighting line, went down the slope in single rank, out over the post of poor Ruckel lying there skewered with Tonto shafts, and in dispersed order, with carbines at ready, they beat through that chaparral, stirring up the jack-rabbits by the score, and, later on, finding here and there and in a dozen spots the track of Tonto moccasins, unmistakable as the hoof-prints of a moose, but finding not a single Tonto. Fleetest of mountain warriors, they had made their reconnoissance and then, while some drew Foster's troop towards the Raton Springs, others slipping in behind had crept noiselessly within ten yards of the drowsy sentry, lolling in fancied security along his shadowy path, passing and repassing between their lair and the starlit southern sky, until, crawling upon him sinuous and slow and patient as the boa constrictor, they had struck at one and the same instant, and dropped him in his tracks with no more than one gurgling, inarticulate cry, then sped away for the foot-hills.

While Raymond's men were beating the bush their comrades of "F" Troop had saddled and led into line at the stables. It was 3.15 when the dismounted company came swinging back up the slope, silent, vengeful, yet thrilling a bit with the sense of unseen danger. Thornton by this time

was fully aroused to the possibilities of Apache warfare.

"It will be daybreak soon," he said, "and I want you, Turner, to push out on the trail of those beggars and run them to earth if a possible thing. Raymond will remain with me. They must belong to some bigger band hereabouts. God grant it isn't along the Sandy,—now!"

Involuntarily as he spoke he turned and looked to the west. There slept old Signal Butte, dark and silent still. No sign of beacon-fire there. There lay the dim and distant ruins of the old post, down in the depths of the shadowy valley. No sign of danger or excitement. Yet if Apaches dare stalk the sentries of a big command as these had done, what would they not dare with so small a detachment as Crane's? And then those unprotected women and children at Kelly's ranch. Thornton had seen exciting times during the war of the rebellion, but women and children never entered into those calculations. It was after three when Raymond's men returned from their fruitless quest. Turner's troop had gone out to the stables and not a word had come from Foster,—not a sign from the Sandy valley to tell that Leon had safely reached the post. Nervously the major paced up and down his broad veranda now, every little while pausing to address some query or instruction to officers or men hastening by. Lights were

flitting about in every set of quarters and on every side. Everybody was astir, even the children. Over at the east the stars were beginning to pale in the faint, pallid light of the coming morn, and little by little the jagged outline of the Mogollon range grew sharp and clear against the reddening sky. Over at the west the peaks began to warm and glow in answer, while at their base the valley of the Sandy still lay dark and unrevealed. Nearly four o'clock,—no further word from Foster. Could he have sent couriers from the Springs who, riding carelessly, confidently homeward, had met poor Ruckel's fate. Certainly by three o'clock he should have been heard from, and here it was almost daylight. In ten minutes, just as soon as coffee could be served, Turner with his troop would push away on his scout, and then all on a sudden a new anxiety flashed upon the major. Nearly four o'clock and Leon's signal had not been fired! Great heaven! were the Apaches on the westward road, then, after all? Was that brave little life another sacrifice? Taking Raymond and his adjutant with him, the major once more tramped out to the westward. There over the tumbling sea of rock and gorge and beetling cliff the gleaming tip of old San Pedro peered at them, his rugged flanks robed in royal purple, but even Signal Butte in the lower valley lay shrouded in gloom. In low tone the sentry on Number Four challenged

at their approach. He recognized the voices of his officers, but orders compelled him to demand further token. "Friends with the countersign," answered the adjutant, half impatiently, as though to say, "We weren't coming on or across your post," yet refraining from the words because he knew the sentry's right.

"Halt, friends. Advance one with the countersign," ordered the soldier in the same low, firm tone, and, obediently, Thornton and Raymond waited while the junior officer went quickly forward and whispered the mystic word over the lowered bayonet of the infantry guard. Permitted then to hold conversation with his visitor, Private Graham answered the first anxious question of the major. "No, sir, not a sign of a fire anywhere in the valley. I've been watching particular." And just at that moment the call of four o'clock began.

Only two calls had gone the rounds since the discovery of Ruckel's fate, and once more now, still dim and indistinct, the post of Number Five down in the low ground to the north was uncovered at the front, for Raymond's troop had returned. Instinctively the officers turned away from Number Four and walked back nearer the northward slope as the soldier watch-cry came on from lip to lip. They could just faintly distinguish the form of the sentry well to the westward of the road,—well out of range, small blame to him, of those stunted

brush-heaps and the point where poor Ruckel had been done to death less than two hours before. He had halted a moment as though to listen to the call as it came to him, and Number Four—the infantryman they had just left—began to take it up as Number Three's voice died away. Then, all on a sudden, Number Five brought his rifle down to the charge and went leaping like a colt along his post to the point where it was crossed by the Prescott road, and instead of the prolonged and melodious call of the hour when it came his turn it was the sentry's challenge, sharp, clear, and imperative, that split the morning air. There was something nerve-tingling, something that smacked of swift coming alarm, in the very tone, and its only answer at the front was the quick rising thud of a galloping horse's hoofs. Again rang the challenge,—all three words jumbling this time into one,—"Whocomesthere?" then, "Halt," —"Halt or I'll fire!" and then Raymond's powerful tones rang out through the breathless air,—

"Hold your fire, sentry! That horse has no rider."

But the only answer was the loud bang of the Springfield, and the leaden bullet went whistling away towards the pole-star. That sentry had heard enough of the perils of the post of Number Five for one night and preferred to take no chances. "Sure, I didn't hear the captain," he explained

a few minutes later. He heard only the rapid coming of horse's hoofs, and despite the fact that horses were things the mountain Apaches never thought of using except when hungry, Private Hanrahan thought all the Tonto tribe were coming, and let drive accordingly. It was only a troop horse, blown and bleeding,—only another evidence of the devilish cunning of the savage foe, for the moment Corporal Dunn could reach them on the run he cried, with a sob in his voice, "It's Tralee, of 'G' Troop, sir. Jim Rafferty's horse." And so at last here was Foster's courier from Raton Springs; but where were the despatches,—where, alas, was Jim? Tralee's heaving flanks and distended nostril and eyeballs told his story of peril and homeward flight, even as the long welt in his broad haunch and the gash through the high pommel of the McClellan tree were eloquent of its cause. Like Ruckel, the sentry, poor Rafferty, homeward speeding with his captain's midnight despatch, had been ambushed at the roadside.

Another thrill to the chorus of excitement that had throbbed the long night through,—and yet, not the last! There were still left a few minutes of darkness and the devil of mischief seemed afloat in the very air. "Go and tell Mrs. Foster the truth the best way you can," said the major, miserably, to his adjutant. "There she is on the veranda now. I'll go round the west side to the

office. You can join me there. Yes, Turner, mount and start at once if your men have had their coffee. Now sweep that road clean from here to the Sandy, and don't leave an Indian to tell the story. Look for Foster or his men,—and try to find Rafferty." And so saying he turned to the west and pushed slowly up the slope, a heavy-hearted man. Almost the last thing he heard as he reached the end of officers' row was Nellie Foster's weeping. If stout, soldier-like Irish Jim could be so swiftly, surely massacred by unseen foe, what could have been Leon's fate,—little black-eyed Leon riding alone, unarmed, with Mrs. Downey's sorely needed medicine, through the dark depths of this Indian-haunted night! But now the mountain-tops were all shimmering with the glow of coming day, and even into the valley depths the faint light seemed to peer, and still there waked no sign of life from the distant out-post,—no reassuring flame to warm his heart with tidings of the boy's safe coming,—but something new and weird and strange was bulging Signal Butte all out of shape, and the sentry on Number Four stood halted in fascination and amaze. The purple fringe of the familiar pine crest seemed to be soaring slowly upward, drawn out into a floating curl, rose tinted at the top where it met the blush of dawn, deep hued below where it left the black base,—then all on a sudden it burst into lurid

glare, red-yellow banishing the rose, and flaming over the valley for many a mile. No welcome signal that, telling of the wanderer's safe return,—no message of hope or comfort, but, most dreaded sign of all, it was the cry for help from the Sandy valley,—the appeal of terrified women and children,—the token that red war had burst about the walls of the old frontier fort and even its little garrison was now in peril.

If Major Thornton was in grave distress before, he was in the depths of dejection now. For hours he had been longing for day, and day had only brought him new and worse disaster. Here he was with one small company of infantry as permanent guard and three troops of cavalry, fresh from the saddle-work of the plains and utterly untaught in mountain fighting, as his striking and scouting column. Well had the Apaches chosen their time, and dire indeed was the effect of their concerted blows. All in a flash the major realized that his little force was scattered or scattering,—Foster somewhere up in the Socorro to the northwest, possibly pushing still farther away from the post and into peril; Turner already marching out in support of him and in pursuit of the ambushing Indians, who at this rate, before another sunset, would line the Prescott road with graves, and this left only Raymond's troop, diminished in strength by the detachment of Lieutenant Crane

and his party, to go to the rescue now. Thornton was quick to think and act. "Mount your horse, you," he cried to the orderly trumpeter just issuing from the adjutant's office. "Ride like a streak after Captain Turner. He can't be across the lowlands yet. Tell him to return at once."

Foster's strong enough to take care of himself, reasoned the major. Poor Rafferty's done for, and anybody who's fool enough to be riding the Prescott road this morning must take his own chances. My first duty is to save these people to the west. Already the sentry's cry had summoned the corporal. The guard was springing to ranks at the tidings that the beacon was blazing on Signal Butte. There was no need of sounding "To arms," since the whole command was practically alert and belted now,—no need to sound reveille, since the entire post was up and astir. The sunbeams were gilding the westward peaks and the upper billows of the clouds of dust in which Turner's troop came trotting back, and, met halfway by instructions,—never entering the post,—turned "column half right" midway across the sandy swale and went cantering westward into the dim valley, spurring swiftly to the rescue, Thornton and his adjutant with them, leaving Raymond in command at Retribution.

And as the sun climbed higher and blazed slanting down upon the mesa, and the soaring dust-

cloud faded out of sight, men and women, too, gathered on that westward bluff to watch for further sign of weal or woe. "O that we had kept Leon with us!" was Mrs. Foster's plaint. "It breaks my heart to think of him." Indeed, Leon and Leon's fate seemed uppermost in the hearts of all. Rare, indeed, were the occasions and strong their numbers when Apaches had dared to face a whole troop in the field, and Captain Raymond strove to soothe the fears of those who trembled at the thought of peril to Foster and Turner and their men. "Apaches have raided the ranches most probably," was his theory. "Crane cannot protect them and the old post too. He has probably been penned at the corral, and could hardly look out for even Kelly's homestead. The Apaches are possibly there all around them, but Turner will brush them off like so many flies. Kelly's people are safe in the cellars, I haven't a doubt, and the old man with the assistance he has can easily stand off the prowlers until they see Turner coming, then they'll all skip for the range,—perhaps run slap into Foster,—and between the two there won't be much left of the Tontos."

All this was very buoyant and reassuring, but women can see so many possibilities of peril to loved ones at such a time. Somebody was sure to be killed and several wounded, no matter how the Indians were driven. It always happened so.

The troops might win the fight and hold the ground and drive the warriors helter-skelter through the hills, but who suffered most? who got the worst of the fight itself? was the thing which wives and children, mothers and daughters, most considered, and in almost every case it must be owned that the preponderance of dead and wounded lay with the troops. "Already two of our best are gone," sobbed an Irish laundress, "and what have we to show for it?"

"Two killed outright!" cried Mrs. Foster, "and one of them our Rafferty,—and now where is Leon?"

Alas! who could say? Leaving Raymond, his weeping women and angering men, let us spur on after Turner and the sorrel troop, by this time nearly half-way to the Sandy. Even on fleetest of American horses we cannot hope to overtake them until they are almost within pistol range of the willows in the bottom, and when we do the first platoon is dispersed in wide skirmish line, the men riding five yards apart. The other is in reserve, ready to strike wherever the foe may be developed. Only a mile away lie the old ruins across the Sandy. Only a mile and a half up there along the *falda** to the north-west are the

* *Falda* is the name given by Spanish-Mexicans to the curving slope with which the mountains or foot-hills usually fall away into the level of the valley.

brown adobe buildings of Kelly's little ranch. Hereaway to the north, nearly opposite the gateway of Apache Cañon through which the Sandy comes brawling, towers the black pyramid of Signal Butte,—a thin smoke still floating skyward from its summit. A dozen times, say the men of the reserve, have they seen Leon's pony tracks on the way, but not once since passing the dry arroyo two miles back. Over beyond that strange, cone-shaped butte,—so strong a landmark as it stands like a sentry guarding the cañon's gate,—the shallow rift in the Socorro tells where the trail comes in from Raton Springs over on the north-east. Riding at speed until within a mile of the timber, Turner has been watching with eager eye for any sign of life or action, of friend or foe, from across the stream, and not so much as wave of flag or blanket or even bandanna has rewarded his wistful scrutiny. Kelly's home is apparently deserted. The dismantled walls of the old post are now hidden behind the sheltering fringe of timber close to the stream. Downey's ranch below is out of sight behind the shoulder of bluff that shrugs to the very brink of the Sandy. "Queer," said Thornton. "Not a sign, yet they must have seen us coming! Look out for every clump of trees or bush ahead there, Turner. Since last night's experience I sniff an Indian in every twig." Turner only nods grimly in reply. All along the skirmish line the

carbines are advanced, the men peering eagerly into the thickets ahead of them. The road itself winds through the low bottom and enters the stream at a gravelly bend opposite the walls of the old quartermaster's corral, but that is a couple of hundred yards farther to the south now. Turner is aiming to reach the open ground midway between Kelly's and the post, and thereby be enabled most promptly to lend aid to either. If the Tontos are in strong force and lurking in the timber to give him a hot welcome, then the fight will be hand to hand, and that's what he wants. If, on the contrary, they are too weak to match him, even with the advantage of position, and have fallen back to the rocky fastnesses of the range, then there is little hope of inflicting punishment, for in his own haunts the Apache can only be thrashed when thoroughly surprised, and one might almost as well hope to catch a weasel asleep. One hundred yards, only, to the timber now, and not a sign from anywhere. More slowly, cautiously the line advances, expecting any instant to hear the crack of the Indian rifle among the trees. The suppressed excitement of the men communicates itself through their muscles, that pardonably quiver a bit, to the mettlesome horses, and these are sniffing the hot air and suspiciously, with wide eye and nostril and erect, twitching ears, studying the possible ambush ahead. Then comes sudden shout from the reserve,

"Look! Look at Kelly's!" And half a dozen horses cower and shy, and such is the nervous strain of the moment, a score of human hearts bound in young troopers' breasts.

Some one—they can't discover who—is waving a shawl or blanket from Kelly's door-way. Some one else can be dimly seen lunging out from behind the ranch and fiercely gesticulating and pointing towards the range to the north. "It's the old man himself," cries a sergeant. "They're all right!" The next minute, too, waving his hat, a trooper comes spurring through the willows at the front and rides briskly out towards the advancing line. Men breathe freer at the sight.

"What's gone wrong? Where are the rest, corporal?" queries Turner, riding eagerly to meet the coming trooper.

"'Patchies, sir,—ran off Kelly's mules and killed his herder and tackled the ranch at dawn. They skipped away up the cañon, and the lieutenant's after them with ten men. He said he knew the captain would be coming as soon as the signal was seen. They fired on our corral, too, sir, but didn't harm anybody. Six of us were left to look after the women and children. It's lucky Downey's people had come, or they'd all been killed."

"Are the women all safe?"

"All safe, sir, but pretty badly scared. They must have had a close call at Kelly's. The old

man wouldn't leave it last night, and Mrs. Kelly wouldn't leave him, but——"

"Then, if you're all safe at the post, we'll go right on to Kelly's," said Turner, impatiently. "Assemble on the right skirmisher!" he shouted to the fighting line. "Sound the trot, trumpeter!" And away he went, with his orderly and a few men at his heels, to the point where the right of the line had just reached the timber.

But Thornton lingered. "How's Mrs. Downey? Did she get her medicine?" he asked, uneasily.

"Mrs. Downey's better since the Indians skipped her, but I don't know of her getting any other medicine."

"Didn't Leon get back?"

"Not here, sir. He may be up at Kelly's. We didn't suppose he'd attempt to come back after Ferguson and the other fellers got in here last night, —chasing old Muncey. They must have run foul of this very band, sir. Muncey rode in all by himself, he said, to warn us and Kelly's people, and was then going——"

"Never mind him. I hope the Apaches have got him. You are sure Leon never got back?"

"Sure, sir. We never knew he'd left you."

And then Thornton turned and rode hard to the ranch. There stood the old sergeant mopping his red face and modestly receiving Turner's congratulations on the plucky fight he had made in defence

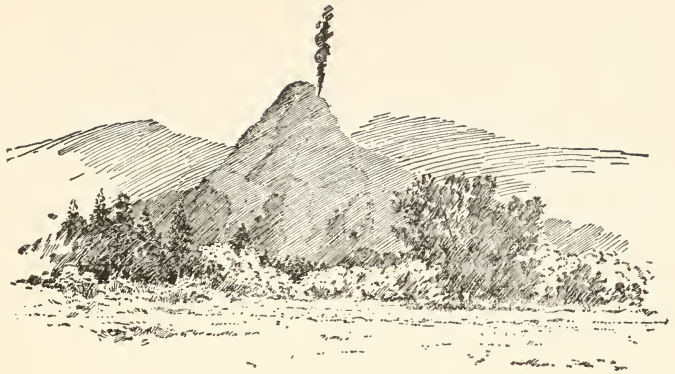
of his home; but the light went out of Kelly's eyes when the major burst forth with,—

"Sergeant, is Leon with you? Did he reach you in time?"

"Leon, sir? I haven't seen or heard of him since yesterday. I thought he was with the women and children down yonder." And the sergeant pointed to the old post, his face paling with grief and apprehension.

"I wish to Heaven he were," said Thornton, sadly. "Mrs. Downey was suffering great pain, and the boy rode all the way to us for the doctor, and insisted on going back with the medicine. We never dreamed—at least I didn't—of Apaches here. God grant they haven't got him."

But just then there rode up from the direction of the cañon Sergeant Charlton with sorrow in his sunburned face. "I'm afraid they have, major," said he, dismounting. "See, here's the medicine-phial,—all we can find of him,—and his pony lies dead at the foot of Signal Butte."



CHAPTER V.

It will be remembered that Muncey with a fleet horse had probably an hour's start of his pursuers, —possibly more,—that he had dropped in at the old post long enough to give them warning, and then had ridden away for Kelly's. "Just as quick as I've warned the old man I'll come back to you," he called to Lieutenant Crane, who had thanked him somewhat inadequately for the service rendered. Crane shared the universal suspicion, perhaps, and disbelieved Muncey's report on general principles. Muncey was spurring off when Crane hailed him, "You must have met Leon a mile or so out,—didn't you turn him back?" And Muncey whirled around in saddle, evidently astonished, and for a moment confused.

"Leon? Never saw nothin' of him—or any-

body," he muttered. "Never knew he was back here,—at least—er—er—I didn't know it until I heard a rumor of it to-night." Evidently it wouldn't do for Mr. Muncey to tell the lie that he originally intended there, as it would soon be known how they had been talking but a few hours before of Leon's return. "How'd you come to let him go?" he queried, turning about again and apparently forgetting his urgent mission to Kelly's.

"Well, he never stopped to ask me," said Mr. Crane, which was very true. "But I can't understand how you missed each other if you kept the road. However, go ahead and warn Kelly, and then come back here and we'll talk about Leon."

And Muncey had gone on to Kelly's, but that was the last seen of him, despite the fact that he gave Kelly to understand that he must hurry over to Crane again at once. Ferguson and his friends came galloping in to old Retribution and stirring up the guard, and they could tell of Leon's safe arrival within easy range of the new post, and of their warning him to stay there; but they, too, had pushed on over to Kelly's, and thence, scoffing at Kelly's story of Muncey's return to the outpost, had told him the man was a liar,—which Kelly already knew,—and a horse-thief,—which he more than suspected. They had ridden straight back past the lower gate of the cañon and made for the trail to Raton Springs. Whether they had met or

had escaped the Indians no one could tell. The fate of Muncey and his pursuers became for the time being a secondary consideration. Thornton's first effort was to ascertain what had become of Leon.

With any luck at all the boy should have got back to the old post by 3 or 3.15 in the morning. Crane and his little guard, Mrs. Downey and her sympathizing friends, however, had reasoned that he would not be allowed to attempt to return, and so had ceased to look for him. Crane conveyed to the woman the tidings brought by Ferguson, for up to that moment he had disbelieved Muncey's wild tale. Then, doubling his sentries, but telling the rest of his party to lie down and rest, he coolly sprawled himself on his blankets and went to sleep. The next thing he knew it was nearly dawn, and the sentries had roused the guard. Springing to his feet, Crane demanded the cause of the alarm, and was told there was firing up by Kelly's ranch. It was still dark, though the eastern sky was beginning to flush, as the little detachment quickly, noiselessly assembled in the starlight in front of the old guard-house. Two veteran war soldiers, Tracey and Collins, were on post at the time, and both declared that there had been a rapid fusillade,—at least a dozen shots. It could have come from nowhere but Kelly's, said they, though from their stations they could not see the farm buildings. Corporal Foot, on duty, was inside the

corral wall when the distant firing began, and ran for the gate-way at once, but it had ceased by the time he got to a point whence Kelly's ranch was visible.

Then for a moment the lieutenant was in a quandary. His orders required him to send to and fire the beacon at the butte if the Apaches appeared in the valley,—but this might not have been Apaches at all. It might well have been a skirmish between the horse-thief and his pursuers, who had tracked him to some refuge near Kelly's. That was a matter in which military interference could hardly have been tolerated. Sutlers and frontiersmen, though eager enough to have the army look after the Indians, much prefer to dispose of their own reprobates in their own way. If an attack had been made by Apaches it was speedily over, for not another sound was heard. Within the corral the women and children, however, had been aroused by the suppressed excitement, and Kelly's daughters were now clamoring to be allowed to go to see if all was well with father and mother, and Crane ordered a corporal and two men to mount, ride thither, and ascertain what had happened. In ten minutes they rode away, and in ten more were back again, driven in by a sharp and sudden volley from the thickets along the Sandy not five hundred yards up-stream. The prowlers had so secreted themselves as to enable them to command the road lead-

ing to Kelly's and the cañon, reasoning, no doubt, that some of the troop would be sent up to reconnoitre. Crane had never fought Apaches before, but this served to convince him. He reasoned that the bottom was full of Tontos, that they surrounded him on every side, and that the only thing for him to do was to dispose of his little force so as best to defend the terrified women and children and hold out against overpowering numbers until relief reached him from the fort. He now thought it high time to fire the beacon, but who was to do it? With Apaches watching every pathway, how could any one hope to reach that outlying butte? Every minute it was growing lighter, however, and as soon as broad day came he determined to make the attempt; and then Downey, also an ex-dragoon and a stalwart settler, took a hand in questioning the corporal who, with his fellows, had been driven in unhurt, yet a trifle demoralized. Neither horse nor man had a scratch, yet everybody had heard the fusillade,—six or eight rapid shots almost bunched. "I never knew Apaches to fire so many shots before," said he, "and miss. You're sure they weren't more'n ten yards away?"

"Certain sure!" said the corporal. "Certain sure!" said his followers, two good-looking young troopers.

Then, after a moment's pondering, Downey said he believed he could get to the butte in safety, and

he'd go and fire the pile, whereat the women began to wail again and the lieutenant to protest, and right in the midst of the discussion somebody shouted, "Hurrah!" and a column of smoke, speedily bursting into flame, shot upward towards the zenith from the summit of the old butte, and everybody thought how plucky a thing it was in Kelly to creep out there and climb that jagged, bowlder-strewn cone in the dim morning light, set fire to the ever-ready stack of light-wood, and steal back to his lair. They were talking of it when broad daylight and Kelly came in together.

"The blackguards ran off my mules," he said, with a fierce oath, "and killed poor Bustamente. There can't be more'n six all told. Can't the lieutenant spare me a few men to go after them? They've all skipped off for the Socorro." But Crane said he'd go himself with a dozen men, if need be, for he had been chafing at the idea of having done nothing at all, and was eager to retrieve himself ere relief could reach them and the chance be gone.

"The bottom must be clear if you came across from the butte," he said, "and very likely they'll run for all they are worth."

"Yes, the bottom's clear enough, sir, though I haven't been near the butte——"

"You haven't? Then who fired the beacon?"

"I'm sure I don't know, sir. I thought, of

course, some of this party had been sent over to do so."

And then the men began looking into each other's faces, bewildered. If not by some one at Kelly's or here at the post, who could have scaled the butte and started the signal-fire? Already a lookout, peering eastward through the lieutenant's binocular, reported a dust-cloud far up the rise towards the new post,—the coming of the reinforcements,—and if Crane meant to do anything at all, now was his time.

"I'll leave you to find out who did it, sergeant," he said. "We'll go on after the mules. Perhaps the Apaches did it themselves as a joke."

"Apaches don't joke," growled the old man, with gloomy face, as the detachment trotted away. "There's been no joke from one end of this night to the other,—but there's been some stupid blundering on somebody's part, or I'm a recruit." And then, turning to one of his daughters, who stood silently by, he said, briefly, "Fetch me the pony, Kate; I'll ride back to your mother."

"Sure, didn't ye know yet, father? 'Twas Leon took ut to ride to the fort for medicine for Mrs. Downey."

And thus for the first time was the veteran trooper made aware that his little friend and foundling had dared that midnight ride. Fiercely he broke forth,—

"And was there no man among ye,"—he turned to the silent group of soldiers left behind,—"no man among ye fit to do a man's work, that ye should let a boy baby ride into the teeth of them Indian devils? Where were you, Phil Downey, that you should send a kid like that for yer wife's poppy-sauce?"

"Where was I but tending to my own business, as you were, Sergeant Kelly," answered the other veteran, stoutly, for between the two ex-dragoons and rival ranchmen little love was wasted. "Of course, if I'd been here, 'tisn't Leon or anybody else would have gone for medicine, but me, as you ought to have sense enough to know, if you weren't so keen to be saddling blame on other fellows' shoulders and so devarting it from your own. Me and Mike spent the night at our ranch, as you did at yours, and niver came up till we heard the firing." And Downey's eyes flashed angrily on his more prosperous neighbor. "I haven't a gov'ment post or a gov'ment arsenal to dhraw on to defind me property, and I have to do it meself," he added, in withering sarcasm; and if anything would stir old Kelly's wrath to the nethermost depths it was the faintest hint that he ever used so much as a single cartridge of all the ordnance stores confided to his care.

"'Tis no time for settling our scores, Phil Downey, or you and I would expind a few 45's as

soldiers and gintlemen did in the days when more gintlemen and fewer frauds were soldierin'. Go to yer wife, you, that's always dyin' if she has an earache, and I'll to mine, that's never known what it was to whimper, and she and I will see what we can do to find the brave little lad that's gone to die for you and yours,—for, by me sowl, the hand that lit yon blazin' signal was his,—as sure as this," and he clinched a hairy fist under Downey's nose, "is at your service in any way ye'll have it, Mr. Phil Downey,—an' it won't be the first batin' it gave ye."

With that he turned his back on a shamefaced group and strode fiercely away in the direction of his home. Never until that instant had it seemed to dawn upon them that by any human possibility Leon had striven to return, had found the Indians interposed between him and the old post in the valley, and then, realizing, what its original projectors had not thought possible, that the Indians had probably so closely invested the post itself as to prevent any one's getting out to fire the beacon, he had risked his own brave life in the attempt,—had given the signal that brought rescue to them at the gallop, and in so doing had betrayed his own presence to the lurking foe. Here again, therefore, was a case where the ground remained in the hands of one party, but all the telling blows were dealt by the other. The soldiers had felt the sting of

Kelly's words. True, no one of their number had been ordered to make that perilous ride, though all had heard Mrs. Downey's cries and moans and appeals for aid, and some one might have volunteered and been allowed to go, but not until Leon was well on his way. True, had Downey been there, he would not have permitted the sacrifice, and was now ready to bitterly upbraid his weaker half for inspiring it. A good woman in many a way was Mrs. Downey, and very fond of the boys,—Randall and Leon,—but the least pain or illness prostrated her, and a serious pain frightened her to the verge of distraction. All this Leon was too young to appreciate. He believed her suffering terribly and in dire need, as did all who heard her, perhaps, but Kelly's girls and her own Mexican maid-of-all-work, and so, just as he thought Randy would have done had he been there, he determined to go, and went without a word to Crane, who might have stopped him,—as, indeed, Mrs. Downey was shrewd enough to declare he would if he happened to hear of it.

And now Crane and his party were well away into the Socorro in pursuit, and Kelly, returning wrathful to his home, was anticipated in his search for Leon by the coming of Turner's troop, followed within a moment or two by Charlton's dramatic announcement of the discovery of the slaughtered pony.

Half an hour later, while the old sergeant was bending over and examining the stiffening carcass of his pet broncho, Turner's best trailers, afoot, were scouring every square yard of those jagged, bowlder-strewn flanks of the butte in search of Leon's trail or that of his Indian foes. Others were examining the signs in the timber and along the Sandy, and the more they found the more were they mystified. Apaches, as a rule, in those days were foot warriors. The Tontos, Sierra Blancas, Hualpais, Apache Mohaves, and Apache Yumas had small use for horse or mule, yet there were more hoof than moccasin prints in the timber and around Kelly's corral. What was more, both mules and horses were shod. That meant that they had run off a good deal of stock and were riding instead of walking, said Turner's men; but Kelly, growing graver and less disposed to talk with every moment, continued searching on his own account, neglecting many a chance to snub some callow young trooper hazarding theories as to the numbers and movements of the Indians. Major Thornton, contenting himself with sending a platoon on the trail of Crane's party, had ridden up to Kelly's ranch to pencil some instructions for Raymond. It was now seven o'clock, and neither he nor his men had seen a single Indian, neither had he news of Foster, nor tidings of any kind; yet, with the events of the night still fresh in his mind, with the

death of Ruckel and Rafferty and Kelly's Mexican assistant and the loss of Leon to mourn, the major felt convinced the Indians had swooped in force upon the valley, and would have killed, burned, and destroyed everything in sight but for his prompt answer to the signal which his forethought had caused to be provided at the top of the butte. The Apaches had desisted from their attempt only at his approach, and had fled into the hills, whither his men were now pursuing. Such, at least, was his theory. This, too, was to be the tenor of his report to department head-quarters, to be sent forward by a detachment that very day. Already he was framing its diction, and, after a few pencilled words to Raymond, bidding him hold the fort, as he wasn't coming,—for the present, at least,—the major had borrowed a big sheet of the ordnance sergeant's official paper and began:

"KELLY'S RANCH,
"SOUTH OF APACHE CAÑON,
"June 2, 187–.

"ASSISTANT ADJUTANT-GENERAL,
HEAD-QUARTERS DEPARTMENT OF ARIZONA:

"SIR,—I have the honor to report that on receipt of your despatch notifying me of the Apache outbreak and directing me to guard well my working parties at old Fort Retribution and the road connecting it with the new post, I detached Lieutenant

Crane with twenty men of Captain Raymond's troop and sent him to camp, temporarily, at the abandoned corral, and also took steps to notify the settlers north and south of the post of the new danger. Deeming it possible that the Indians might attempt to pass around us and raid the ranches, I had caused a beacon to be built on the summit of Signal Butte, and instructed Lieutenant Crane to fire it if he learned the Apaches were in the valley.

"Last evening my sentries reported firing on the Prescott road north of the new post, and Captain Foster with his troop was sent to investigate. He reported by courier that he had come upon two Mexicans who claimed that the Apaches had attacked them and run off their mules, they themselves escaping by hiding in a dark ravine. They also reported a large party of prospectors, etc., at Raton Springs, and represented them as being in peril of similar attack, so Foster pushed on at once to their succor, expecting to reach them at midnight. At 2.30 A.M., Trooper Ruckel, a sentry on post in the low ground to the north of the post, was found dead, pierced by several Apache arrows, and Captain Raymond with his men made a search through the chaparral as far as the foot-hills without discovering anything of the enemy. A few minutes later a horse recognized as Private Rafferty's, of 'C' Troop, came riderless and wounded

into the post, and I had just despatched Captain Turner with his troop at daybreak to scout the country along the Prescott road, when the flaming signal at the butte told that the Indians had worked around to the valley to the west of us. Leaving Captain Raymond with the infantry and his half troop to guard the post, I proceeded with Troop 'F'—Turner's—to this point, reaching here after a sharp trot in less than an hour and a quarter, only to find the Indians fled with some stock from Kelly's ranch, and Lieutenant Crane already in pursuit. The only casualties in the valley thus far reported is one Mexican herder killed at Kelly's, and I regret to add the probable loss of a gallant little fellow, Leon MacNutt, whose pony was found a few minutes ago at the foot of the butte with three Apache arrows through him. It is feared that the boy has been killed or run off by the Indians, who are reported to have fled into the fastnesses of the Socorro to the north of us. If so, between Captain Foster's troop already in the field and those here at hand I hope to make short work of them." And here Major Thornton was interrupted by the entrance of the ordnance sergeant. It must be remembered now that old Kelly had served in Arizona in his dragoon days before the war, and had just completed another period of five long years with the Eleventh Cavalry, the predecessors of Thornton's regiment. Like

every other old soldier, he was inclined to the belief that new-comers had very much to learn, and, as we have seen, the Indians themselves were taking advantage of this inexperience. Kelly couldn't be disrespectful to an officer, but he had much to say and there was no time to be lost.

"May I speak to the major?" was his abrupt request, as he stood erect at the door-way, his hand raised in salute. Thornton wheeled round in his chair and looked up in quick interest.

"Certainly, sergeant. Go ahead."

"As I understand it, sir, Lieutenant Crane's party followed the trail into the cañon and would go on through in pursuit."

"That's my understanding also," said the major.

"And did the major order the detachment that followed Lieutenant Crane to go on till they came up with him?"

"Yes. He couldn't go very far, you know; he took no rations."

"I know, sir; but from what I hear the lieutenant rode straight into the cañon and expected to find the raiders there somewhere. Once into it, sir, there's no way out but through it."

"Very true."

"Well, what I'm afraid of, sir, is this,—the Indians who have run that stock into the cañon so as to make a trail to draw the troops in pursuit are only two or three in number, but if there's

more Indians in those hills,—and the chances are there are,"—and Kelly pointed significantly to the rugged heights so nearly overshadowing them,—"the most of them will be found lying on their bellies up the cliffs and ready to heave down whole tons of rock on our fellows in the gorge."

Thornton started to his feet and stared eagerly out of the north window in front of him. "That's a very serious matter," he said; "but wouldn't we have heard of it by this time? The cliffs are nearly all down at this end, are they not?"

"Most of 'em are, sir, but there's a bad slit within a mile of the north gate, nearly twelve miles from here, and another about midway. If they jump the troops at this end they'd know the reserves here would be galloping up the game trails east or west of the cañon in no time, whereas if they wait and let the lieutenant and his party grope along to that narrow part of the cañon just below where old Sanchez and his people were drowned out, why, they've got 'em, sir, got 'em where they can't hit back or help themselves in any way."

The major hastened out into the open sunshine, now beating hot and dry upon the adobe walls. "Bring my horse, orderly," he called, as he stowed away his unfinished report, and a boy trumpeter, with his slouched hat pulled down to keep the sun glare from his eyes, turned away from where a

little knot of men had just buried the body of the luckless Mexican herder and darted into the corral, presently reappearing with the major's reluctant charger towing at the end of a taut bridle-rein. "Now let Sergeant Kelly have your horse," said Thornton, "and give my compliments to Captain Turner and ask him to join us. Come, sergeant, show me the trails."

Old Kelly was already in saddle beside the commander and, never waiting to let down the stirrups, but with his long legs dangling, led the way along a winding path to the stream, and then through the willows to its wooded bank. A trot of three minutes brought them to the bluff at whose rocky base the Sandy came boiling out of the cañon. Ahead of them, fresh and distinct, the hoof-prints of a score of horses had obliterated all sign of what might have been driven ahead of them; but, wheeling his horse abruptly to the right, Kelly plunged into the foaming waters and sent him sputtering—breast-deep—to the lower bank on the opposite side. Here in a shallow depression to the east of the stream lay some soft and marshy ground, and here the old sergeant reined in and pointed without a word to some peculiar footprints. Thornton, following his lead, gazed down at the sign, then into the sergeant's face for explanation.

"When did you find these?" he asked.

"Not fifteen minutes ago, sir. The animals

went into the cañon as Mr. Crane supposed, and he followed, but that's the print of the Tonto moccasin, and some of those bucks have cut across below here, skirted the edge of this here *cienega** close as they could without getting into it, and gone on up the heights. It's my belief they've planned to trap the lieutenant, and we can't get after them along this trail too quick."

Thornton turned and gazed eagerly down the Sandy. Out from the willows, loping, rode the tall and soldierly form of the captain of the sorrel troop, hastening to join his chief, but before he could ford the stream, far to the northward somewhere among those resounding rocks came, faint, distant, but unmistakable, the ring and rattle of musketry.

"By heaven! old man, you're right," cried the major. "Mount your men, Turner," he shouted, "and get them up here,—lively!"

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* *Cienega*, a little marsh.

CHAPTER VI.

It was some twenty-three miles, as has been explained, in a general north-westerly direction by a crooked road from the new post of Fort Retribution, around the base of the Socorro, past Raton Springs (eight miles out), to the fords of the Sandy, which lay some five miles north of the upper entrance to Apache Cañon. It was about ten miles, nearly due west, from the flag-staff at the new post to Signal Butte. Apache Cañon, from gate to gate, was a rift of nearly eleven miles, and the course of the Sandy was about south-east by south. So here was a rude scalene triangle with a ten-mile base, a sixteen-mile adjacent side, and a twenty-three-mile hypothenuse, —"crooked as a corkscrew," as the troopers said,— and this little triangle, solidly filled with mountains, was the field of operations of Major Thornton's command in this, its first campaign against Arizona Indians. The Sandy took a sudden turn to the south-west as it passed the old post and flowed away in that general direction to its con-

fluence to the Gila, and the old roundabout wagon route from Retribution to Prescott went down the Sandy, around the southern end of the mountain-range, and then away north-westward up the valley of Willow Creek. The only short cut through the Socorro clump was by the old Tonto trail from Signal Butte at the south to Raton Springs to the north-east; and this, said Sergeant Kelly, was not the route by which the raiders retired on the approach of Turner's troop, but was the route by which they descended into the valley. If so, they must have come over from Raton Springs, and Foster's men should not be far behind them,—only Foster hadn't a soul with him who had ever been through there or could trail by night. He had to wait for day, and possibly was waiting for orders. There were game-trails all through the rocky, pine-covered heights, but these would only confuse the uninitiated.

If, as Kelly declared, the Indians had dared to drive their captured stock straight through the cañon, to lure the troops after them, while a larger party lurked in ambush on the overhanging cliffs, it meant that they had scouts watching Foster and ready to lead him astray, while others, far to the north, keeping wary eye on the movements of Colonel Pelham's troops at Sandy, despatched swift runners or communicated by smoke or flame signals that only Indian eye could read.

"They feel secure for this day, sir," said Kelly to the anxious and perplexed field officer, whose command was now so widely scattered, "or they wouldn't wait to jump the lieutenant."

Had they "jumped the lieutenant?" That was the absorbing question. The firing had died away almost as suddenly as it began. The sounds came from the general direction of the cañon,—not that of the trail to the Springs. It could not, therefore, be a clash between Foster's troop and the Apaches. It must have been Crane's men, to whose support a whole platoon had been despatched, but, if what Kelly said was true, they were little better off than so many rats in a trap. All this the major was rapidly considering while Turner rallied his men down-stream and came trotting up to the cienega. Then, led by Kelly, afoot and in single file the little party began the tortuous ascent to the heights. In ten minutes they were again in saddle and trotting now through a bold and beautiful range. To their left lay the deep chasm of Apache Cañon, and off to the eastward could be seen the dark rift through which ran the trail to Raton Springs. A guard of ten men, together with Downey and his fellow-ranchmen, remained about the post, so that at this moment, say eight o'clock of a hot June morning, Major Thornton's force was distributed at five or six different points, at both the southern angles and along the outer edge of this rough

triangle. Verily, the Apaches, indeed, seemed to know how to "play" the new-comers.

"If poor Rafferty hadn't been headed off and killed," said the major to Captain Turner, who, now that there was greater room, rode up alongside, "we should have known Foster's discoveries and movements. As it is, we are completely in the dark. I'm not so anxious about Crane now, for he has evidently got through the lower part of the cañon all right, and hasn't had time to reach the bad stretch at the northern end, but I hope he's safe out of the bad place in the middle."

And just at this moment the old sergeant, riding a dozen yards ahead and coming to a sharp turn around a rocky point, reined suddenly in and signalled halt. With much clatter and sputter of hoofs the rear of the column seemed to double up on the leaders before the rapid trot could be checked, and then, with heaving flanks, the horses huddled in a bunch. There was an opening in the hills to the right, and a game-trail led down around the very point where Kelly had halted and was now off his horse studying the ground.

"I thought so, sir," said he, pointing eagerly to certain prints in the rock-dust along the trail. Then, bending low, he worked over towards the edge of the cliff. "See here again, sir, and here, —Tonto moccasins! They probably crept out close

to the edge—two or three of them—to watch what might be coming up through the gorge below."

Turner was listening with a whimsical smile on his face, and here interposed. "Look here a moment, sergeant," said he. "I have been doing some little scouting down-stream, and there are some points that may not have occurred to you. I admit we're new to Apache scouting, but there are some general rules that all Indians recognize. Now, we learned a bit from our Pawnee scouts,—and a Pawnee would say that these fellows" (and here Turner pointed to the footprints in the yielding turf) "were peering over at something going up the cañon ahead of them, and not what was coming behind. Let me ask you, What has become of Muncey and Ferguson and all their crowd all this time? Where did they go?"

"God knows, sir; but ever since the cloud-burst Muncey's too big a coward to push through the cañon alone at night."

"Ordinarily, yes,—I admit that,—but this time 'twas life or death with him. For some reason he stole the best horse at the fort—Ferguson's—and skipped in the dark. I believe he was in hopes of joining Manuel and his gang. I believe he thought he could safely stop and get credit for giving warning to Lieutenant Crane and yourself, —then he pushed out over towards Raton Springs. You say there were the prints of a dozen horses

and mules this morning coming down into the valley?"

"Yes, sir."

"Well, they would obliterate any prints of those going up. Now, wasn't that Manuel's party? Don't you suppose Muncey met them in the hills,—had them hide until Ferguson and his friends passed them by in the darkness, and then came on down by Signal Butte, intending to stay with Crane's guard, or else, perhaps, to push on down the Sandy to the Gila and Tucson after they got what they wanted?"

"Got what they wanted? Does the captain mean Leon?"

"Leon, mules, horses,—anything else to help them in their flight. How do you know who killed your herder and ran off your mules, sergeant? Could you see?"

"No, sir; it was lighting up a little at the east and I'd fallen into a sort of doze, and the boy, I suppose, thought everything was all safe and he went out to let the mules out of the stuffy box in which we'd penned them for the night. The next thing Mrs. Kelly and I heard was the firing. It was down the hill-side towards the water, and I could only shoot at the flashes."

"Exactly! What I believe is that those two bands of thieves—Apache and Mexican—ran foul of each other in the dark. Muncey and his party, scared to death, perhaps, have fled north-

ward into the cañon, and the reason you had no more trouble is that the Apaches put out after him. We have got the whole field ahead of us at this minute. I only wish we knew who has Leon."

"Mount, then, and come on," said the major, eagerly. "Turner, you're probably right." And then, as if in confirmation of the theory, far to the front again the crack of cavalry carbines echoed along the mountain gorge.

And here, four miles out from the lower gate, the walls of the cañon seemed to fall away. Still jagged and steep where the Sandy lashed at its banks, the rocky face of the cliffs was but a dozen feet or so in height, and thence the pine-covered slopes rose and rolled in bold upheavals, with sheltered valleys between each mountain-wave. Along through the pines led the Tonto trail. Along in single file, now at rapid trot, now at easy lope, but often climbing and sliding clumsily, the sorrels followed. Far down in the gorge the old cañon trail could be seen. "It's just around that point, sir," said Kelly, presently, his eyes snapping with excitement, "ould Sancho and Leon's father were drowned out. We knew it because when the flood went down you could find mules and men, saddles and apparejoes,* rifles and

* *Aparejo*—pronounced apparayho—is the Mexican pack-saddle, now adopted for use of the pack-trains of the United States army.

blankets lodged among the rocks and trees for miles below, but nothing above. They was swept out just like so many rats in a mill-race."

"There's a mule down there now," cried a keen-sighted trooper, riding close behind the captain.

"He's killed this morning, then,—and yon's a horse. See?" cried Kelly, pointing eagerly down into the depths. "The first tackle must have been right along here somewhere."

Once more ahead of them the cliffs began to narrow. Once more the trail clambered to a projecting point, and then skirted a rocky palisade commanding a view of the cañon for two miles,—the Sandy leaping in foaming rapids five hundred feet below. One after another the troopers reached the point and then, following the leader, spurred into a lope, for Turner and Kelly—foremost now—had caught again the sound of firing, and presently out from the sockets whipped the carbines,—the fight was in view ahead.

But what a fight! Down in the depths of the gorge—sheltering themselves as best they could from occasional bullet and frequent bowlder hurled from up the heights—some forty blue-uniformed troopers were falling slowly back before the ceaseless onslaught of a foe they could neither see nor reach. Just as Kelly had feared, Lieutenant Crane had been lured into a trap, and the supporting platoon reaching him could only share his predica-

The trail clambered to a projecting point, commanding a view of the cañon for two miles.

ment. Just how far up the cañon he had succeeded in following the trail was now a matter of little consequence. Crane and his men were making the best of their way out, bringing their wounded with them. It was the first lesson,—a bitter one, and one that would have been far more tragic but for the coming of their better led comrades along the upper trail. Long before Turner and Kelly could sight a single Apache the Apaches had caught sight of them, and then, darting from rock to rock, slinking from tree to tree, away sped the lithe, sinewy fellows out of rifle range. Only a few long-distance, scattering shots were exchanged between Turner and the almost invisible foe, and Crane's fellows, sending up stentorian cheer from the stream-bed below, drowned for the moment the roar of the waters. Throwing out some keen shots as skirmishers to prevent the reappearance of the Indians, Thornton and his troop leader signalled Crane to fall back to a point where the Sandy flowed in smooth, tranquil reach for a hundred yards or so, and there, one side clambering down the heights, the other climbing up, the officers were able to compare notes. The first question was as to Crane's losses. Several horses killed, three abandoned, and two men wounded,—"but," said he, "they've cleaned out some Mexican outfit a mile up-stream. We almost caught them at it." And so, leaving the wounded with the guard and

attendants to make the best of their way back to the old post, the two commands again pushed on up-stream,—Crane on the lower and Thornton following the upper trail, both parties in single file. Turner kept the front well covered by a few skirmishers. Half an hour's march brought them around a wooded point, and there deep down in the gorge,—just at the spot where Sanchez camped that luckless night two years before,—under the burning blue of the midsummer skies lay the wreck of another "outfit." Flood and fury had scattered the possessions of the former party broadcast down the cañon. Fire and flame and Tonto bullet or barb had huddled those of the second into a blackened hideous heap. Crane had followed in very truth the trail of the raiders at Kelly's ranch, but the murderers of the luckless Bustamente were his own countrymen,—the robbers of Kelly's corral were Manuel Cardoza and the genial Muncey. Here were the stiffening carcasses of the old sergeant's pets,—here the half-dozen pack-mules,—packs and all,—here the mutilated remains of the poor devils whom Cardoza had abandoned, for up the cañon went the shod hoof tracks of American horses. Overtaken by Apaches, two well-mounted leaders had left their humble followers to fight it out as best they could,—and who could be the cowardly pair but Muncey and Cardoza?

Extinguishing the smouldering fires, gathering up such contents of the saddle-bags and apparejoes as were undamaged by the flames, Crane's party, watched by Thornton's from the opposite heights, slowly remounted and set forth on their return. "If Foster comes through the mountains with his troop, tell him we'll join him at the old post in a few hours," sang out the major from across the stream. "We've got to come back for something to eat soon as we scout to the north side, and if this be a specimen of Apache business," added Thornton to himself, as he slowly remounted, "it's too complicated campaigning for me."

And so by noon that sultry and long remembered day, after burying the murdered Mexicans under cairns of stones, Crane and his wearied men were jogging back within hail of Signal Butte, while Major Thornton, with Turner and some twenty hungry troopers, pushed northward, determined to scout the Socorro to the Prescott road. Turner still kept his skirmishers ahead. There was no telling where the Indians might open on them from rock or precipice or tree. Kelly, raging in his heart to think that he had lost his mules and herdsman through such scoundrels as Muncey and Cardoza, attached himself closely to Turner, with whose judgment and foresight he was now greatly impressed. It was extremely hot and the water in the canteens utterly undrinkable by this

time. The horses, too, were suffering, but it was impossible to get them down the steep to the dashing stream, so even when, after an hour's weary marching over the upland trail, they came in sight of the broad valley of the Sandy above the range, Thornton decided to go on down to the lowlands and water before starting on his return. It was high noon, hot noon, a scorching noon, and the men's eyelids were blistered by the fierce rays of an unclouded sun. They were hungry, too, for not one had had bite or sup since coffee at dawn, but they bit at their plug tobacco and jogged silently on, and up to the moment of their catching sight again of the old trail that wound beside the Sandy, not an Indian had been seen or heard of. Now there rose into mid-air a little dust-cloud far out near the Prescott road, telling of some party in rapid movement. "Muncey and Cardoza skipping for all they're worth," hazarded Kelly, but Turner shook his head. "That cloud's coming this way," said he, "and coming fast,—and it's some of our own people."

And so it proved. Less than half an hour later, down by the plashing waters the two detachments came together. Comrades of the same regiment, yet from stations miles apart, the sunburned, dust-covered fellows from up the Sandy rode in to the welcoming ranks from Retribution. "What news

of the Indians?" was naturally the first inquiry, and rapidly officer to officer, man to man, the two parties exchanged views. The commander of the little party from Camp Sandy was a brave soldierly fellow, Captain Tanner by name, and with him were two or three experienced scouts; Al Zieber was one, a fellow who knew Apaches and Arizona even as their old guide, Buffalo Bill, knew the Pawnees and the Plains. "There isn't a hostile west of the Sandy this day," said he. "They've all had their jump and done what damage they could, and now they're skipping back to the Mogollon country." But Zieber looked grave and troubled when told of the deeds of the previous night. "They are little detached war-parties," said he. "We may strike one of them down near the Springs, but I doubt it."

In brief conference the officers decided what should then be done at once. Tanner sent his lieutenant with a "scout" of twenty men down along the north face of the Socorro to find Foster and follow full speed any of the straggling Apaches whose trails they might discover, hoping even yet to recapture Leon. Then the pack-train came up, and presently cook-fires were blazing in the timber, and from the Camp Sandy supplies a hearty dinner was served out to Thornton's men, while Tanner proposed his plan. "My instructions," said he, "were to leave an escort of twenty men here at

the ford for the general's ambulance,—he is hurrying down from Prescott and should be here by sunset. We have a little party to meet him at the ranch over towards Willow Creek. Now, you and your men and horses need a few hours' rest. Suppose you stay here with your detachment, and I'll take my men and see what we can find up yonder in the hills," and Tanner pointed to the Socorro. "Leon's captors may be waiting there for darkness before attempting to cross the open country towards the Mogollon. You can have four hours' sleep and be ready to ride on to Retribution with the general to-night."

So said, so done. Soldierly Tanner called up his men, saddled and rode away. Thornton's horses were given a good feed of barley from the pack-train, and with a small herd guard on duty the rest of the command sprawled anywhere where they could find shade, and were snoring in ten minutes' time.

The sun went down red in the western sky. The smouldering fires in the sandy bottom began to glow with the deepening twilight. One after another the troopers began to awaken, stretch, and yawn, and ask if further news had come in, and just at nightfall one of Tanner's sergeants brought in three jaded civilians,—Ferguson and his friends. All night they had hunted Muncey without success. All day they had hidden from Apaches,

who at dawn, said they, were thick as leaves in the Socorro, and Ferguson was loud in his disgust at the escape of the two arch-thieves. And not ten minutes after they came in from the south, covered with dust and drawn by six spanking mules, with a dozen grimy troopers as escort, the general's big black ambulance drove in from the north.

First to emerge from the interior was a snappy aide-de-camp, followed quickly by the grave, quiet-mannered chief himself.

"What's the truth about Muncey's party?" asked the aide, in a gasp. "He and a Mexican rode by us like mad,—said they'd been cleaned out completely, and were so demoralized they couldn't stop."

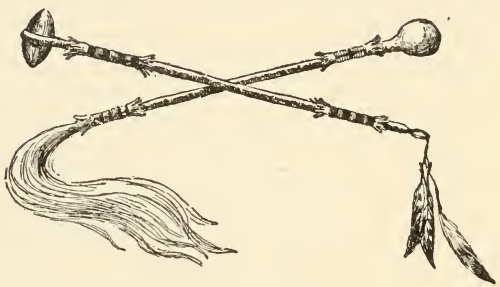
"Only a case of diamond cut diamond," answered Thornton, briefly. "They had been running off horses, mules, and boys for what I know, and the Apaches caught them red-handed. These gentlemen," said he, indicating Ferguson and his party, "want them for horse-stealing,—Kelly for murder and mule-stealing, and all of us, I fancy, for boy-stealing."

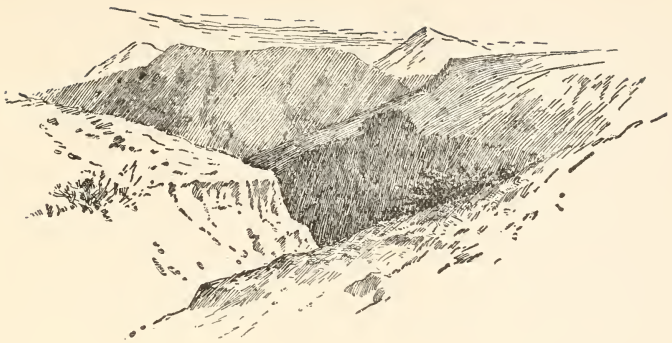
A tall man in scouting dress was backing out of the ambulance at the moment, helping a bright, blue-eyed lad to alight. He turned in quick anxiety as the general asked, "What boy?"

"Leon, sir,—little MacDuff. If he wasn't with

Muncey, I'm sore afraid the Apaches have got him."

Whereupon the blue-eyed boy burst into tears. "Oh, father," he cried, "have we come too late after all?"





CHAPTER VII.

Major Cullen, hastening back to the field of duty, had made much quicker time than even he had thought possible. Alighting from the Central Pacific express at the Oakland wharf at eight o'clock of the fair June evening, the little party was met by an aide-de-camp of the general commanding the military division of the Pacific, whose head-quarters were in San Francisco, and, as they steamed across the beautiful bay towards the great city of the Golden Gate, with its myriad lights rivalling the reflected images of the stars, the latest tidings from Apache land were unfolded. The military telegraph, the pioneer of its kind, had not then been strung across the Mohave Desert, and all communication between Arizona and the nearest telegraph station—Drum Barracks, at Wilmington, on the California coast—was by courier or buckboard, and it was here, instead of in Ari-

zona, that for a time the department commanders had been allowed to establish their office. It was here that the news of the revolt at the reservation was received by the new commander,—here that he had wired to Cullen and received his reply,—here, a few days later, that there was brought to him the tidings of the general uprising. Unlike his predecessors, the new general commanding this remote field decided that the place from which to direct operations was not Drum Barracks, several hundred miles from the scene, but the heart of the Indian country, and thither he went, fast as buckboard could bear him.

"Tell Cullen he'll find me somewhere in the Sandy Valley or Tonto Basin," he said to his adjutant-general as he drove away, and this message was placed in Cullen's hands as, with his silent and devoted wife by his side and Randy looking eagerly into his face, he was borne swifty over the dancing waters.

"That means that the general expects them to leave the mountains and raid the mines and settlements," said he, reflectively. "What's the first stage or steamer down the coast?"

"Nothing now before to-morrow night," was the reply, "unless you can catch the 'Maritana.' She's off for Santa Barbara and Wilmington with supplies and ammunition in about an hour." Mrs. Cullen gave a little shiver and drew closer to her

soldier husband's side, but said no word. She knew that what he conceived to be the soldier's duty would rule.

"Then you and Randall will go with Captain Thorpe to mother's," he gently said, after a moment's thought, "and I will take the boat."

But when the "Maritana" sailed that night the major's family went with him. Mrs. Cullen calmly announced her intention of going back to Arizona with her husband, and accepting the warmly proffered hospitality of the general's wife until their new quarters should be in readiness. The mail buckboard went on across the California desert within an hour of the "Maritana's" arrival, and while Mrs. Cullen was cordially welcomed by the little colony of army wives and mothers at Wilmington, her husband and her only son hurried on to overtake the chief. It was with infinite misgiving that she had let Randall go, but the boy pleaded with all his heart and soul, and the father decided. "I promised him that he should cross the desert with me," he said, "instead of going round by sea, as he has both ways thus far, and he will be as safe at Prescott or Camp Sandy or Retribution as he is here,—and Mrs. C——'s house is crowded now. He is wild to meet Leon again, and the two boys can remain together at the post while I'm in the field. I'm only afraid the fun will be all over before we get there."

And so it was settled. Many a time before the boy had been his father's companion in mountain hunt or scout, but never when the Apaches were swarming as at this moment. "We shall find none of them west of Date Creek," said Cullen, "and east of there our escort will be too formidable for them to jump. Have no fear for him." But what mother could banish fear for the safety of her only boy? No one saw her parting with the brave, eager, blue-eyed little fellow. Devotedly though he loved her, he was soldier all over, like his father, and eager to act the soldier's part,—eager to go with him to the seat of war, over mountain-pass and desert and treacherous stream-bed, regretting, if anything, that there was no likelihood of encountering Indians on the way. Her heart was wrung,—yet, like many and many another army mother of the old army days, she simply had to face the inevitable. She was to follow with the general's wife and their party of ladies, children, and servants by steamer around old California, and up the gulf to the Colorado, within the fortnight. By the time they reached Fort Yuma the outbreak would probably be all over and the Indians back in their mountain homes, —the troops in garrison. It was one of those temporary separations mothers elsewhere marvelled at and declared impossible, but that army mothers wept over yet bowed to. Night and day for forty-

eight hours, while she prayed for them within sound of the Pacific surges, father and son whirled rapidly eastward across the turbid Colorado, resting only an hour at Ehrenberg, where they changed buckboard, mules, and driver; then, pushing on again by starlight, gradually rising from billow to billow of the long leagues of desolation to the wild and picturesque scenery of the Sierras,—then through resinous forests of pine, through rocky cañon and winding gorge, until they were landed, stiff and sore, dusty, hungry, and thirsty, among the log huts of the little garrison at old Fort Whipple, catching the department commander just two days before even that impatient soldier thought it possible.

Then, after a refreshing bath and a few hours' rest, in the general's own big ambulance and escorted now by wary troopers, away they went for the valley of the Sandy. Everything indicated, said the chief, that the Indians, after wiping out the Santa Anita settlements, had swooped upon the lower valley while the garrison at Retribution was in its state of transition,—and very probably they had made it lively for Thornton. Couriers had rushed to Colonel Pelham at Camp Sandy with orders to send strong columns southward at once, one of them following the valley to meet the general at the fords just above Apache Cañon. Away sped their fine six-mule team down through the

fertile Hassayampa,—across to the broad valley of Willow Creek, changing mules and escort at the mountain ranch, and getting all manner of startling news and rumors on the way. Away at last for the Sandy, passing early in the afternoon, while Randy was dozing in his corner, the foam-covered, dust-begrimed pair,—Muncey and Cardoza,—"too badly stampeded to stop and talk," said the sergeant commanding the escort, "but shouting that they alone had escaped."

"We should reach Retribution by midnight," said the general. "And just won't I hunt up Leon and wake him and hug him the moment I get there, and won't he be amazed!" said Randall, joyfully.

The story of the boy's long tramp for home was familiar to one and all by this time, and had won the little fellow a host of friends among officers and soldiers alike. "No one can believe what that fellow Muncey says, though I have reason to think the Apaches have reached the Sandy," said the general. And so, on they went, rattling and bumping and jolting down the winding road to the east of the range, and at last pulled up in the midst of Turner's troop at nightfall, and then for the first time did Randall dream that his friend and playmate—his almost foster-brother—was gone, and no one could say how or where.

Tired and drowsy as he had been during the

long hot day,—tired as all might well be, there was no thought of weariness now. In breathless interest the little party listened to Major Thornton's description of the events of the previous night, Randall's heart throbbing hard as he heard of Leon's brave ride for Mrs. Downey's sake, and his tears raining afresh as Thornton told how they had found the pony after daybreak, pierced with Apache arrows near the butte. "Had they searched the butte itself?" asked the general.

"Every crevice of it, sir," replied Sergeant Charlton, who had found the pony. "There was no trace of him there."

"Indeed, there was no place there where he could hide," said Randall, sadly. "We had hunted and played scout all over it,—all over the neighborhood, in fact. The only places we had to hide were in the old cañon itself, because we believed there the Indians wouldn't come."

"And you had some hiding-places in there?" asked the general, placing his sunburned hand on Randall's shoulder and looking kindly down into the boy's brimming blue eyes.

"Yes, sir, three or four of them. We had two down under the cliffs near the south end and another up by the cove where old Sanchez camped, —near where they were when the cloud-burst struck them. We were up there twice only ten weeks ago," and again Randy's lips were quivering,

though he fought manfully to control his grief. "We had a regular little cache of stores there—hard-tack and cheese and frijoles—in case we ever had to hide there when we were hunting."

"You'll make a good frontiersman one of these days, Randall," said the bearded chief, calmly glancing at his watch. "I shouldn't be surprised if you and Leon could teach us a thing or two worth knowing now. Now, Cullen, I've got to push right on for Retribution,—the new post. We'll pick up Tanner's people on the way and take a few of Turner's men from here. Thornton and Turner can go on with me, and you and Randy take their horses and a dozen men and search the cañon to-night. It's my belief that your little protégé has given both crowds the slip, and that if he is in the land of the living Randy can find him."

It was then nine o'clock of another hot, still, cloudless, starlit night. In ten minutes, with a few words of encouragement to the boy and a cordial hand-shake and pat of the shoulder, the general bade them all good-night, sprang lightly into his ambulance, the aide-de-camp following, and away it went, escort and all, splashing through the Sandy. Half an hour later, Major Cullen was once again in saddle among the old familiar scenes, and, followed by Randy, Sergeant Kelly (who was overjoyed to welcome back his old captain), and a

dozen troopers who had never yet served with him but knew him well, as soldiers will, by reputation, the major rode on down-stream to where, dark and frowning, the black gate loomed before them. Randall in his mad impatience to be off could hardly wait for the men to be served with coffee and the horses with a bait of barley before starting on the night-ride through the dim and ghostly chasm. Old Kelly gave them constant encouragement. "If he was caught by Apaches and killed we'd surely have come upon his body, Masther Randall," said he; "and after he fired that beacon, and Muncey's outfit and the Apaches ran foul of each other, neither party wanted to be burdened with a boy. But the Apaches were between him and the old post. He's had only one place to run for, and that was the cañon. Muncey's outfit probably reached it almost at the same time, and he had to hide from both. By this time, it's my belief, he's stolen out and made his way back to the old post."

It was nearly midnight when Cullen, riding at brisk walk at the head of the column, pointed silently to the huge black bulk of precipice overhanging the Sandy a few yards ahead. It was so dark that only by giving the horse his head and an occasional prod with the spurred heel the leader could follow the winding trail. "We're within a few rods of the Sanchez camp," muttered

Kelly to the impatient boy. "The cañon opens out just below here."

"I know," said Randall, briefly. "I'm wild to signal to Leon now. He knows my call as well as a bird knows its mate."

"Ah, but it isn't up here ye'll find him, Masther Randall," said the old man, striving to prepare the boy for disappointment. "It's too far for him to have come, and even if they had fetched him this far, he'd be working back now for the post, where Mrs. Kelly and the girls will be 'mazin' glad to see him."

But no sooner had the leader of the little column passed the base of the cliff than Randall urged his horse forward to his father's side. "I can tell it in the dark," said he. "May I go ahead?" Cullen nodded, and the boy spurred eagerly on. The Sandy roared and rushed close by the trail as it turned the point, then more placidly swept along over some pebbly shallows where the heights on the western side fell away and gave place to a deep and sheltered nook. They had reached the spot where the Sanchez party was camped when overwhelmed by the cloud-burst, where the luckless Mexicans that very morning, following blindly their rascally leader, were corralled and massacred without mercy. Their bodies, as we have seen, had been buried by Crane's party, but the stiffened and broken carcasses of the mules still lay there,

already beginning to taint the summer air. The major had expected Randy to turn into the cove, but the boy pushed sturdily ahead.

"How much farther, Randall?" he asked, in low tone.

"Two hundred yards or so, father. There's a *pitahaya** right opposite the place."

Then for a moment more the click, click of the iron-shod hoofs along the stony trail and the soft rush of the waters were the only sounds to break the silence of the night. Dark and shadowy, still in single file, the party rode unerringly on, Randall leading. The boy's heart was bounding with hope and eagerness. The grief which had overcome him when told of Leon's probable fate had given place to high and spirited resolve to play a man's part in the effort to rescue him. What boy with a drop of soldier blood in his veins would not rejoice in being a "leader of men" amidst such surroundings and on such a quest? No trooper could see more than the dim outline of his file-leader, but Major Cullen's eyes rejoiced in the alert, soldierly bearing of his son. They had almost passed the cove and were once more entering the black shadow of the cliff when Randall's horse shied suddenly, stumbled and went down on his knees. The boy's deft, practised hand had him

* *Pitahaya*, the giant cactus-tree.

up in an instant, but something went slinking away down the bank and, over on the opposite shore, the wild, weird cry of the lynx, half snarl, half warning, rose above the rush of the stream. Somewhere farther down the echoing cañon the cry was taken up and repeated, and old Kelly growled aloud. "The major knows best, sir, but if there's Apaches hanging about here anywhere that's the way they'd be signalling maybe, and I wouldn't like to have them heaving rocks down on Masther Randall."

"We're almost there now, father," spoke the boy for himself. "They can't roll rocks on us once I get you in there. There's our landmark now." And right ahead, around another abrupt shoulder or cliff, there loomed up through the night the shaft of a tall cactus,—the *Cereus giganteus* of the Gila Basin,—and here again the heights broke away, and through a broad opening to the right the stars peeped down in silvery splendor. Unhesitatingly the boy led on into this nook of the mountains. One after another the click of hoofs on the rocks gave place to soft thud upon the yielding turf, and presently, as Randall reined in and threw himself from the saddle, the party gathered in silence around him.

"It's quite a climb from here," he said. "Will you come, father,—and Kelly? The rest had better stay."

A trooper took their reins. Silently the boy led on, bending low and searching the foot-trail. In a minute they were climbing some steep ascent, slowly, cautiously. Presently they reached the little ledge of rock and stopped to breathe. Down in the depths of the cove a trooper struck a match to light his pipe, and the stern voice of Sergeant Charlton reproved him with, "Don't you know that if there are Indians about, that's a sure way of telling them where to fire."

"I've got to light a match in a minute, father," said Randall, "but it will be so far in the cleft it won't be seen above." Then once again he pushed on, still climbing some old game-trail. About two hundred feet above the bottom he stopped, his heart beating hard. "I'm going to give our signal," he whispered. "It's one we had when we played scout."

A moment of silence, and then in low, mellow whistle two notes, not unlike the "Bob White" pipe of our quail, were lifted on the night air. Breathless, all the troopers far below—the little party on the hill-side—waited the result. "The boy's right," muttered old Kelly to himself. "If Leon's in hiding from Apaches anywhere here, he'll welcome that call." No answer came, and once again, a little louder, Randall piped anew. Still no result, and with a sob in his voice the boy turned.

"I'll not give up till I've searched the cave," he said; "but he'd have answered if he'd heard," and so once more led on. Presently they came to a deep cleft in a bold outcropping of rock, and into this Randall cautiously turned. "Keep a few yards behind me," he whispered; "I've got to light my match."

One moment, and with a snap and flare the blue flame of the lucifer flashed upon their sight, slowly turned to a yellow-red, and was lifted towards a dark aperture in the rock. One instant of hesitation,—of doubt and bitter disappointment,—and the boy passed stealthily in. Then something seemed to stir far back in the dark. There was a sudden start,—a stifled gasp. Then a simultaneous cry, "Leon!" "Randy!" And in a confusion of sounds of scrambling and hugging, and something suspiciously like sobbing and laughter intermingled, the match went out.

When, after a moment's lull, old Kelly struck a light and peered with moistened eyes, the boys were apparently doing a bear-dance together, and a bear-dance consists in hugging one's partner tight as tight can and hopping up and down, around and around,—and then the word went down the heights in a jubilant shout, and was answered by a soldier cheer, "MacDuff is found,—all right!"

What a story Leon had to tell when late that

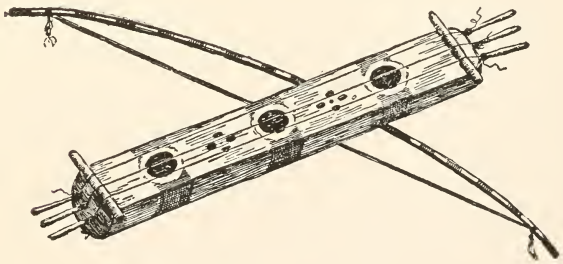
night they sat about the camp-fire! Riding back from the new post, his pony had shied in an arroyo some two miles from the Sandy, and he had lost his hat in the dark. Then, while hunting for it, the pony took a notion to wander, and was presently lost to view. Dismayed, Leon searched over the flats, but to no purpose. Not until the dawn was breaking did he come upon him again, close to Signal Butte, quietly grazing; and then, all on a sudden, he heard the firing at Kelly's, and in less than no time a dozen shadowy forms flitted between him and the distant guard-lights at the post, and he realized that the Apaches were in the valley. Leaving his pony to his own devices, Leon climbed the rocky height and, taking no thought of his own danger, fired the beacon. Then, hurrying down in hopes of escape, discovered several Indians rushing for the butte, saw that his retreat to the post was cut off, and made with all speed for the cañon, thinking to hide in safety there until the coast was clear; but they followed, or at least he thought it was they. He heard the shouts and hoof-beats at the entrance. Terror lent him wings, and he ran like a deer up the gorge. Walking and running, an hour's flight brought him, almost exhausted, to their cove of refuge. Here he clambered to the cave and there lay for hours, listening later to the shouts and sounds of battle, never daring to creep forth even when nightfall came,

and, after long hours of vigil, worn out, he fell asleep, only to wake in Randall's arms.

Leaving the boys to the care of his friends at the new post, Major Cullen, with three troops of his new regiment, chased the scattering Apaches out of the Tonto Basin without further loss to settler or soldier. They had had their dance, and had sense enough to know when to quit.

Old Fort Retribution is only a memory now. Apache Cañon is threaded by a narrow-gauge railway. A populous settlement has sprung up in the Santa Anita. Kelly's ranch is owned by one of the Kellys, but under another name,—that of her husband,—for the old sergeant was gathered to his fathers long years ago. Muncey never came back, even when the Santa Anita mines were worth revisiting,—even when the claim of MacNutt and Murray was sold to good advantage and Leon's sole benefit. Ferguson's beautiful roan had reappeared after a time, as did Ferguson and his friends, and they said they found her over in the Agua Fria country, where Muncey and Cardoza seemed to have run foul of the Apaches again, and this time without escape. At any rate, Apaches were seen there just a day or so before the runaways, and they covered a multitude of sins. The old butte flamed its signal once again long years later, when the Indians had an outbreak on the Cibicu, but that was after Pelham and the —th

had served their five years in Arizona, and, with Major Cullen and Randall, left for the new stations in Kansas and Nebraska and for long campaigns against their old friends, the Sioux and Cheyennes. By this time the boys had spent their high-school days in San Francisco and were sprouting down upon their sun-tanned cheeks and planning for future years of service in the life they loved; and the last time I saw them was some ten years ago,—Leon a stout, stalwart sergeant in the cavalry,—Randall riding, a platoon commander in his father's regiment,—all the better soldiers, both of them, for the boy days in scout and saddle around Apache Cañon and under the shadows of old Signal Butte.



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